



# HER FATHER'S DAUGHTER



KATHERINE·TYNAN·HINKSON



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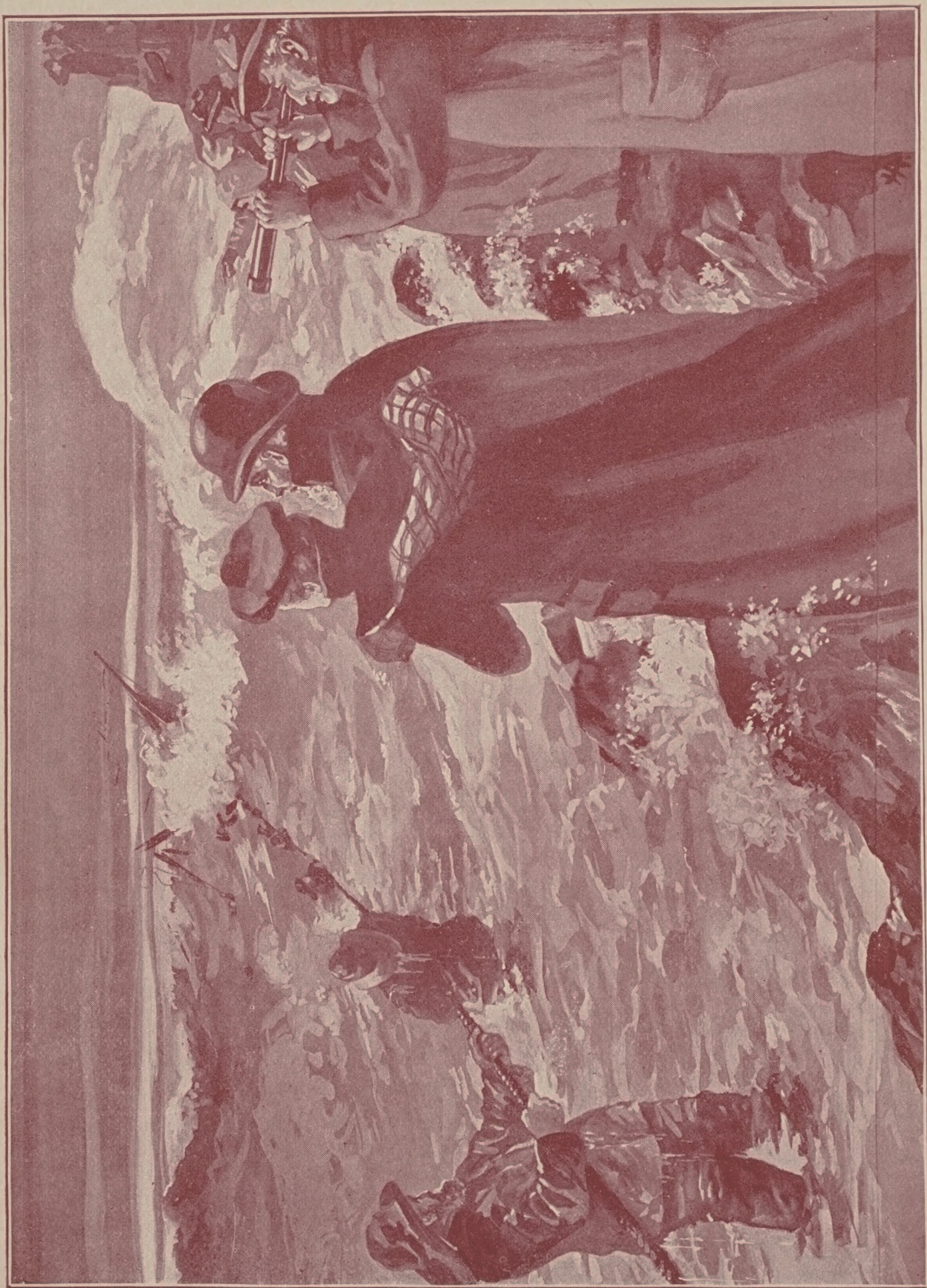












*“Phil, clinging to her uncle’s arm, gripped it more tightly than she knew.” P. 50.*



# HER FATHER'S DAUGHTER.

A NOVEL.

BY

KATHARINE TYNAN HINKSON,

AUTHOR OF "THE DEAR IRISH GIRL," "THE QUEEN'S PAGE," ETC.



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.



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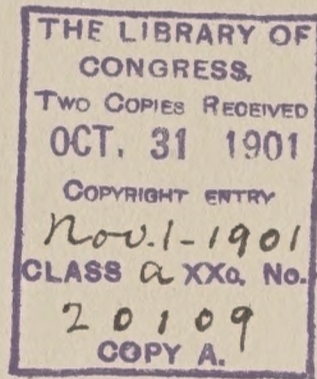
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# CONTENTS.

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	PAGE.
CHAPTER I.	
OLD, UNHAPPY, FAR-OFF THINGS, . . . . .	11
CHAPTER II.	
MOTHER AND DAUGHTERS, . . . . .	21
CHAPTER III.	
THE CASTLE OF DREAMS, . . . . .	27
CHAPTER IV.	
THE STORM, . . . . .	39
CHAPTER V.	
THE WRECK, . . . . .	47
CHAPTER VI.	
THE CONVALESCENT, . . . . .	54
CHAPTER VII.	
AN AMATEUR PROVIDENCE, . . . . .	65
CHAPTER VIII.	
COLOMBE, . . . . .	74
CHAPTER IX.	
COLOMBE HAS HER WAY, . . . . .	80



	PAGE.
CHAPTER X.	
AUNT FIN EFFACES HERSELF, . . . . .	88
CHAPTER XI.	
"GREAT ADO THERE WAS, GOD WOT," . . . . .	97
CHAPTER XII.	
AUNT FIN IS FOUND, . . . . .	104
CHAPTER XIII.	
FATHER TOM AND PHIL HAVE A PLAN, . . . . .	113
CHAPTER XIV.	
COLOMBE'S WAY, . . . . .	121
CHAPTER XV.	
COLOMBE MAKES A CONFESSION, . . . . .	128
CHAPTER XVI.	
COLOMBE'S TRIUMPH, . . . . .	137
CHAPTER XVII.	
COLOMBE IS BENEVOLENT, . . . . .	145
CHAPTER XVIII.	
PHIL'S REWARD, . . . . .	152
EPILOGUE, . . . . .	155



# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE.
“Phil, clinging to her uncle’s arm, gripped it more tightly than she knew.” . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece.</i>
“During that long, unhappy journey from France, she was in his arms day and night.” . . . . .	19
“Phil had run up the stairs and was kneeling, the center of an affectionate circle of dogs, who were licking and pawing her.” . . . . .	37
“Thinking over these things, Phil had a sudden sense of some one’s eyes being upon her.” . . . . .	55
“‘Phil!’ gasped Peggy, ‘don’t say any more. I can’t bear it.’”	69
“‘If I should see Piers Vanhomeigh!’ echoed Phil, ‘I am to console him, I suppose; to look after him in your absence. Is that it?’” . . . . .	83
“‘It will be your turn next, Phil,’” said Aunt Fin, noticing, perhaps, a silence that seemed unsympathetic.” . . . .	93
“Phil took her by the shoulders, and shook her. ‘How dare you, Aunt Fin,’ she said, ‘and you our guest, too! How dare you!’” . . . . .	111
“The hand which held the scissors shook so much that Colombe had to desist. After a few seconds Phil went out of the room.” . . . . .	133
“It was with lowered eyelids and trembling lips that Colombe spoke.” . . . . .	139
“‘Welcome, Mr. Lismore!’” she said, ‘It is awfully nice of you to come so quickly.’” . . . . .	147
“She ushered them both into the presence of Father Kirwan and the parson, Mr. Thornhill.” . . . . .	157







# HER FATHER'S DAUGHTER.

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## CHAPTER I.

### OLD UNHAPPY FAR-OFF THINGS.

THE house inhabited by Mrs. Featherstonehaugh and her two daughters was on the Mall, an old-fashioned place, which remains in one's memory as a dim vision of shifting green lights and shadows. The canal went sluggishly between two rows of tall elm and poplar trees which almost met overhead. The banks shelving to the water were covered with grass and little water-weeds, except where the feet of the canal-boat horses had worn a path for themselves. There was little water-way except in the midst of the channel, and at the canal edges you could see the waving water-weeds thrusting out slender fronds in the green water. The canal had become choked probably since the gay days when the fly-boats brought it half the traffic of the South of Ireland. Enough water-way remained for the infrequent boats laden with bricks or turf that went by so slowly, as though it were a Dutch picture and no moving world.

The houses on the Mall were dark because of the great trees in front and at the back. The very light that came through the old-fashioned windows of twelve oblong panes was a green light. Happily the complexions of Mrs. Featherstonehaugh's daughters were equal to this setting, and the comely lady herself with her fortunate silver hair about her rosy cheeks and mild eyes bloomed softly in the dark rooms like a rose in an overgrown place.

Mrs. Featherstonehaugh had once been wont to refer in a pensive manner to the fact that she was white before she was



thirty. She had been white when John Featherstonehaugh had brought her home to the house on the Mall, a beautiful young woman, still bearing traces of the heavy grief of her premature widowhood.

She had been the gayest of the gay when John Featherstonehaugh had first been her lover. They had met at a Castle ball, and had danced themselves into friendship that very first night. She was then Columba O'Kelly, an orphan girl living with her two aunts in a stately impoverishment in the wilds of Connaught; and heaven knows what pinching and scraping there had been before that Dublin season gave the young girl her chance to be seen.

Miss Finola and Miss Peggy O'Kelly sat among the chaperons that night watching their niece enjoy herself, and remembering their own good days before the Encumbered Estates Act had left Castle O'Kelly bare of its acres and its rent-roll. Miss Peggy forgot her Maltese flounce which she would never see again; Miss Finola her great-uncle's tulip-wood cabinet which had fetched such a preposterous price from a London dealer, seeing the young girl's happiness in her first ball, and meeting again old friends long passed out of sight, but not of memory.

Columba was certainly in great request. In her white satin and pearls, and her white sandal shoes with roses instead of rosettes, she danced nearly the night through.

Now and again she would come back to the two proud and fond aunts, flushed and smiling, to rest by them an instant and then be whirled away again.

It was surprising how many people yet remembered the two Misses O'Kelly, though it was twenty years or more since they had danced on this very floor, and that was when Lord Carlisle was Lord Lieutenant. On every side old friends were coming to them now, claiming recognition and waving away the score of years as though they had not existed. Columba was not likely to want for partners, seeing her own beauty and the newly-restored popularity of her aunts. She danced perhaps oftener than was quite



conventionally correct with the dark, pleasant-faced young man whom her aunts called Johnny Featherstonehaugh. But wasn't his Uncle Ralph their nearest neighbor at Castle O'Kelly, and had he not brought a delightful atmosphere of neighborliness and masculine helpfulness into their quiet lives? Columba had only not known Johnny Featherstonehaugh as well as they did because she had been at her convent school during the years since Mr. Ralph Featherstonehaugh had come to Cliff House, and her vacations and Johnny's had not chanced to synchronize.

Yes, it was quite suitable that she should make friends with Johnny, and dance with him oftener than she would with any new acquaintance.

It was when the night was well-advanced that Columba suddenly disappeared from the ball-room, and did not reappear for a sufficient length of time to somewhat perturb the anxious and simple-minded ladies.

When at length they saw her, she was dancing with a very dark and elegant young man, compared with whom Johnny Featherstonehaugh, leaning by a door-post, his honest face somewhat overcast, looked awkward and provincial.

"Who is it?" Miss Finola asked of a new-old crony, Mrs. Maxwell, of Mount Maxwell. "I don't think the young gentleman has been introduced to us."

Mrs. Maxwell looked through her gold-rimmed glasses, and looked again.

"It is M. de Ste. Croix," she said. "All the girls are wild about him, and faith, my dear, he looks as if he had been caught at last."

A flutter passed from one sister to the other. They had no provincial prejudice about the foreigner, but Columba was their nestling, and Mrs. Maxwell's words disturbed them.

"He is of—good family?" Miss Finola asked anxiously.

"As good as your own. I suppose nothing could beat the O'Kelly blood or I'd say better. Where did he get that shape except by breeding? Look at the way he holds his head and the



sparkle in his eye, and his fine slender hand and foot. If I was a girl myself, I'd be as great a fool as any of them."

"Oh, now, Marcella, you were always a pattern of discretion since the old days at the Sacré Cœur," said Miss Finola, smiling faintly.

"And Dominick Maxwell caught and tamed me young," went on the comely matron, who looked at least ten years younger than the maiden ladies who had been her friends at school. "He never gave me a chance to sow my wild oats, so it follows that I have them all sprouting in me yet. But don't be anxious about the young man, Finola, my dear. I've never heard a worse word against him than that he shares our common fate of having more blood than money. Still he's not a pauper."

"How does he come here?" Miss Finola asked timidly. It was contrary to all her traditions to be violently interested in a young man just because he was her niece's partner at a ball; but her anxiety about something in his air and Colomba's, that something which Marcella Maxwell had noticed, made her put aside her delicate scruples.

"He has a bit of land, my dear, enough to sod a lark, somewhere in the County Westmeath. He comes over a couple of times a year to look after it, and he is invited everywhere. Even the match-making mothers are not afraid of him, though the girls may have their little fancies before they settle down to some comfortable, unromantic marriage. He has a way with him, as I dare say you'll find out yourselves before long, but he doesn't seem to follow it up."

Mrs. Maxwell went off laughing, and in a very short time her place was taken by Columba, wearing the look of pretty penitence with which since her childhood she had always been able to disarm her aunts' displeasure. She begged leave to introduce M. de Ste. Croix, who bowed over the thin hands stained with gardening and household work of the two spinsters, as though they had been the hands of a queen.

Poor Johnny Featherstonehaugh was in danger of being for-



gotten except by Miss Peggy, who was very faithful to her friends. He did not sulk, being the good fellow he was. That night, and during the weeks that followed, he was as kind and serviceable to the Misses O'Kelly and Columba, as though there was no such person as M. de Ste. Croix, though that young gentleman was very much in evidence indeed at the lodgings in Molesworth Street, where the ladies stayed, at their social functions, and even on their shopping expeditions. Often and often Johnny Featherstonehaugh found himself somehow escorting one of the aunts through crowded Grafton Street of an afternoon, while Columba walked ahead, M. de Ste. Croix by her side, the envy of all the girls.

Perhaps only for the persistent Johnny, M. de Ste. Croix had kept his freedom unscathed as he had kept it from girls as lovely as Columba O'Kelly, for all her ravishing complexion and red-gold hair. But the presence of Johnny in the background, ever patient, ever ready to take the position the other man vacated, acted more potently perhaps than Columba's beauty. If Johnny had been well-advised he would have gone away for a bit; but he was a straight fellow, without craft, and despite his profession, the unromantic one of a solicitor, without suspicion that other men whom he accepted on his own level might not be quite so straight and uncomplex.

However he felt about it, when M. de Ste. Croix proposed to Columba and was accepted, he took his punishment with an unmoved face; and with a characteristic kindness and faithfulness he refused to be the shadow on the general joy. Even to Miss Peggy, who was fond of him, and had an almost motherly way of calling him "my boy"—just like his Uncle Ralph—he revealed nothing of the sorrow Columba's acceptance of the other man had been to him; so that at last Miss Peggy, half-disappointed in him, began to believe that her romantic ideas had led her astray in suspecting an attachment at all.

Columba went away to France with her husband after their marriage, leaving a void indeed in the mouldering halls of Castle O'Kelly and in her aunts' hearts.



Two years, three years passed. There was a little girl born of the marriage, another Columba, who almost dispossessed in the Misses O'Kelly's dreams the auburn-haired child they remembered. But for those years the little Colombe was only in their dreams. Columba's passionate protests when she left them that she would return, were forgotten, or she was unable to come, and her own bare, innocent room at Castle O'Kelly awaited her, swept and garnished in vain.

Then one day, before Columba had been four years a wife, there came a message like a cry from her. M. de Ste. Croix had been injured, riding his own horse in a steeplechase, a newly-discovered diversion which he had had the honor of introducing from Ireland into the Parisian world. He was injured, he was hurt, he was dying. Before Miss Finola, in charge of Johnny Featherstonehaugh, could reach her niece's side, M. de Ste. Croix was dead.

Into the trouble and helplessness of those days Johnny Featherstonehaugh came like a kind, strong genius of helpfulness and compassion. He saved the young widow everything that could be spared her. What had Miss Finola O'Kelly been without him, indeed? The acuteness of her sympathy made her almost another burden, and, sitting wringing her hands by the dumb widow's side, she was worse than useless. The little Colombe was a wild, healthy child, too young to be long depressed by the trouble about her, and no subject for nursing and petting such as her great-aunt would have given her.

Johnny Featherstonehaugh saw even to such a little matter as that the child's happiness and health ought not to be interfered with by confinement to a darkened house and its gloomy society. The little one went out as usual with her *bonne* during those days preceding the funeral, and conceived a tender affection for "le beau Monsieur Feathers," who amid the wreck and ruin of everything, found time to visit the shops and bring Colombe home a fascinating new doll, and the prettiest boxes of chocolate.

Wreck and ruin it was. Even while Gaston de Ste. Croix lay unburied the creditors were clamoring at the doors, and the ser-



vants, all except the *bonne*, a stout, motherly peasant of Normandy, carried dark faces of suspicion, and whispered to one another about their arrears of wages, without a kind thought for the sweet-faced mistress whose rule had been so generous and so gentle.

Johnny Featherstonehaugh settled it all somehow. The figures in his bank-book underwent an alarming alteration about this time, but no one was any the wiser except Johnny and the bank manager, and the latter was professionally discreet.

Columba fortunately asked no questions. It was not till quite a long time afterwards that Johnny, her unofficial man of business, broke it to her that whatever little property her husband possessed in France had had to be sacrificed in order to pay outstanding debts. Columba was no woman of business and was satisfied that Johnny must have acted for the best. She was glad that Knockcrievin, the little Irish property, had been saved for her Gaston's daughter. For the rest, back in Castle O'Kelly, the romance and glory of her youth seemed to have passed like a dream. There was nothing left of it but her widow's veil and that bright elf, Colombe, whose dancing gayety the widow at times gently resented.

The memory of the dead had not indeed remained with little Colombe. On that long, unhappy journey from France, which was like a dream of disaster in the widow's memory, the child had been ill, upset by the departure from routine, and perhaps a little neglected, despite Marie's faithful fondness in those days of trouble.

On the journey she had turned pettishly even from Marie to Johnny Featherstonehaugh's arms. During that hasty journey, almost like a flight, she was in his arms day and night. No wonder that a fellow-passenger, taking Johnny for the tenderest of fathers, brought a hot blush to the supposed father's cheek by a sympathetic speech.

Johnny was at once touched and exquisitely pleased at the child's fancy for him. Though he must often have been cramped during the journey, he would not put the child out of his arms



even while she slept, and he sat wakeful more than one night with the hot little cheek against his shoulder and the little hand clasping his.

It was no fleeting fancy on the child's part either. A light, gay, beautiful thing, like a summer moth, little Colombe seemed to have just one thing of permanence, of stability, in her character, and that was her devotion to Johnny Featherstonehaugh.

Her mother was half-jealous of it, not for her own sake, but for the sake of the brilliant young father of whom the child had not the shadowiest memory, who had been pushed out, dispossessed of his one child's heart by the stranger.

She fretted over it one day to Johnny himself.

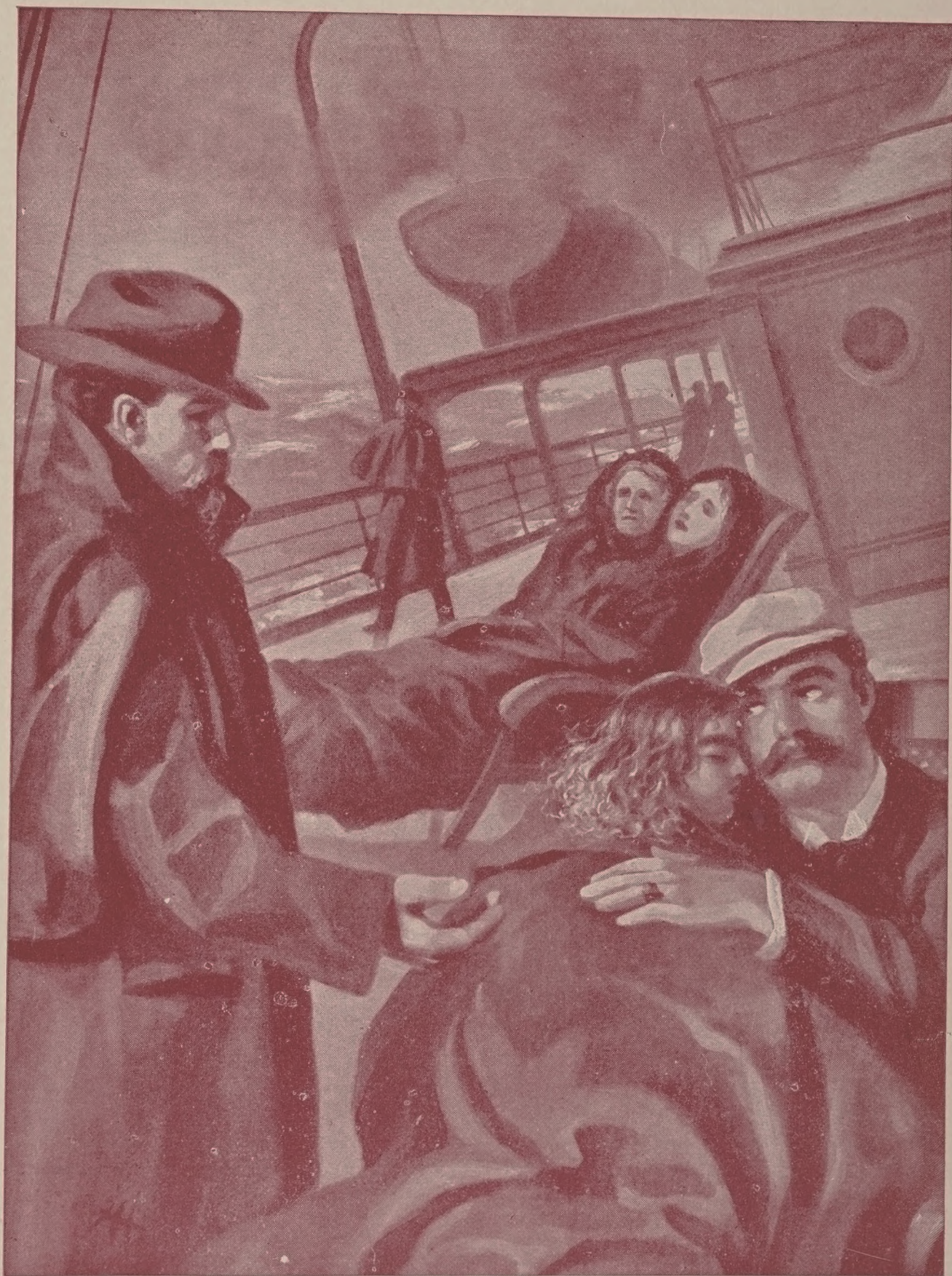
"Any one would think you were her father," she said complaining, and then, with a flash of bitterness, "I think children are horrible."

"She was too little to remember," said Johnny, gently. "She is a loving little thing. Why not give me a father's right to look after her, Columba?"

On the woman's side the marriage was one of convenience, though the ugly thing was more presentable than usual. Johnny was the dearest of friends, and the child adored him. He expressed to Columba's mind everything that there is of what is honorable and estimable. And Castle O'Kelly became poorer and poorer year by year. After the first shock of amazement the widow began to look at every side of Johnny's proposal. Of course she could never give him any love; that was out of the question, since her heart and youth lay buried in Gaston de Ste. Croix's grave. But everything else she could give him, quiet affection, and trust, and respect and obedience.

So on those terms they were married, and Johnny Featherstonehaugh never seemed to make it a grievance that his wife did not swerve in all the years that followed from the bargain she had made with him. He never grumbled, though years afterwards, when the weakness of mortal illness wrung speech from his long silence, he talked on the matter once to his own daughter.





*"During that long, unhappy journey from France, she was in his arms day and night." P. 17.*







"I served twice seven years for my Rachel, Phil," he said, when the sweat of mortal pain was on his forehead, "and I never won her after all."

## CHAPTER II.

### MOTHER AND DAUGHTERS.

PHILIPPA FEATHERSTONEHAUGH was, as people said, Johnny's own daughter. She had the same kind, grave eyes, the half-humorous, half-tender mouth. She was brown-skinned like her father; but her brown hair had borrowed something of gold from her mother's, and lay close and fine, like bronze feathers, as it was drawn back from her wide brows.

She had always been graver than her years, a responsible little person even as a small child, whose sudden laughter came upon people, delightful and bewildering. Johnny Featherstonehaugh had been serious and merry: his daughter followed him with a humorous appreciation of the humor of things behind a grave and bright face.

She had always been taken for Colombe's elder, from the time it was possible to blunder about their ages. The passage of the years made the five years of time between them insignificant, seeing that the younger was so much quicker of development, so much more mature of mind. What did Colombe want with intellectual things indeed? She was no shallow-pate; but her beauty was not of a kind to be associated with intellectual effort. She had a thousand pretty accomplishments; she was the brightest of the bright, and had charming and deft ways. It would have been unfair that her beauty and grace should have been accompanied by more serious mental gifts than these.

She had inherited her mother's lovely coloring without that mother's placidity and self-absorption. Colombe was never still, a bright, glancing creature, who seemed to bring brightness into a room when she entered it. There was no mystery behind the



gentian-blue eyes. When you met Colombe for the first time you felt that you knew all of her that was to be known. But he would be exacting indeed who should ask for more; and Colombe's world was not exacting. Perhaps after all there was more of mystery in her than any one suspected.

There were a good many unspoken thoughts as well as spoken between Johnny Featherstonehaugh and his daughter Phil. Sometimes they conversed in their veiled manner over Colombe during those long days of illness, when the friendship and confidence between father and daughter grew knitted with the intensity of bonds that must soon be strained to breaking. Sometimes it was Colombe's mother who was in their thoughts, and indirectly in their speech.

Once there was a sudden flash of bitterness from Johnny, when Phil had remarked that Colombe took little or nothing from her own father. It was a light for Phil over a dark place in the past. Her intuitions were quick and she only needed the clue to find the whole difficult way.

"No, thank God," said Johnny, with hard emphasis, "when he died, he died indeed."

"It might have been better to have spoken," said Phil, remembering how the dead man had persistently kept him who was now dying out of his wife's heart. "Why should she have made a saint of him all these years?"

"What matter, child?" Johnny said, a little drearily. "Her paradise has not been spoiled. How could I have answered for what might happen to her if I had spoiled that for her?"

Phil was silent. She was so much of her father that instinctively she jumped to his point of view. Through his self-sacrifice her mother had kept that sweet, unspoiled, childlike placidity of hers which made her beauty fair and open, like the beauty of a child. The sorrow that had whitened her golden head had put no dark secrets into her eyes. At seven and forty she yet looked the vessel of a white soul.

"Colombe has been your child, at least," she said.



Johnny winced; but he smiled as he answered her.

"Yes, the witch," he said, "she made me hers from the beginning. She is hardly less dear to me than you, Phil. And she loves me well."

"I know. Nearly as well as I do, father."

"Some people might think her light, Phil, and a—a—a little selfish. We know her better than that, eh?"

"We know her better than that. She does not love many people, though she is so sweet to all."

"Only you and me, Phil, and"—again Johnny hesitated—"and her mother, of course."

"Mamma, of course," assented Phil. "Not the same way she loves us. They are too much alike."

"They are too much alike. When I am gone, Phil, you will be to them what I have been."

"I will try to be," said the girl steadily. A sharp spasm had passed over her frank face, but she refrained from any expression of emotion.

Her father looked at her with pitying tenderness.

"My good Phil, my brave Phil!" he said, and then averted his eyes.

"They will be desolate when that happens," he went on. "Columba has always leaned on me, and the child will be heart-broken. She was a great happiness to me in the old days, Phil. Be careful of her, comfort her. She believes in you as she believes in me. Take my place toward them, Phil. Be what I have been, what I would be."

"I will do my best," said Phil, in a low voice.

"I am proud of you, Phil. Not every father of a girl twenty years old could trust her as I trust you."

He lay silent a minute watching her. Then his face took a new expression.

"It is a heavy burden I am putting on your twenty years," he said. "And listen, Phil. I don't quite mean all I have exacted from you. I don't want you to be sacrificed, Phil—you under-



stand. You are dearer after all. Take care of them, but do not stand out of the way if you have a right to be there. Perhaps it is not well after all to let others have all the sunshine. It is enfeebling, even for them."

His voice sank away. They had been more explicit than usual with each other, and the effort to speak after long reticence had been a strain. He was falling asleep.

A few weeks after this conversation Johnny Featherstonehaugh's unselfish life came to an end. He died at peace with God and his fellow-man, and in great love with his own family. Death could hardly take a more inspiriting shape than now when it found a man ready to welcome it, secure in the promise of a future life and the merits of his Redeemer. "God send us all such a death," said the old priest who had attended his dying moments, "and such a harmless life to merit it."

One day Phil Featherstonehaugh would come to feel almost joyful in her thoughts of the father who had lived and died greatly; but at the moment of his death incredulous grief swallowed up all comfort. She had to fight it alone, on her knees, with wide eyes and heart heavier than a stone when at last her mother and sister had exhausted themselves in grief that was almost despair, and fallen into sleep. What a relief it was when sleep at last took the two frenzied creatures to her quiet breast. Phil was different. She could not beat with bleeding hands against the wall beyond which Johnny Featherstonehaugh had passed, out of hearing of those whose call his heart had ever leaped to answer. Phil's grief was a sane one, without the alleviations of exhaustion, and though friends flocked to their help there was much no one else but Phil could do.

At last it was all over, and the blinds were up once more in the house on the Mall. Life began again, with a difference, for Johnny Featherstonehaugh's widow and orphans, for the child who was the daughter of his body and the child who was only the daughter of his heart.

With a difference, for Time brings his revenges. Dead, Johnny



Featherstonehaugh won from his wife what she had denied him living. With the curious readiness to shift an opinion or a standpoint which Phil had often marvelled at in her mother, she suddenly slammed the door upon the years in which she had been Gaston de Ste. Croix's wife, and the many other years of her second wifedom in which she had never let her widowhood slip out of her sight. With something like impatience she thrust the grief of her girls aside as though none but herself had a right to be desolate. In a single night her age showed itself in lines on her smooth face which no longer looked too young for its frame of white hair.

Time modified the first violence of her grief, but never again was she heard to refer pensively and half-complacently to her early trouble. The numerous signs and tokens of remembrance, which had been as so many thorns in Johnny Featherstonehaugh's patient heart, disappeared, as Gaston de Ste. Croix's memory disappeared somewhere into the background of Mrs. Featherstonehaugh's thoughts.

Phil saw and marvelled. The change in her mother was genuine, but it repelled Phil vaguely. Why had she not given him a little of this in all the years his heart was hungry? She had more real tenderness for Colombe, who grieved to herself as though the world only held herself and her trouble. It would pass, said Phil, it would pass; one could not think of Colombe as long out of the sunshine; but she had loved the dead man before Phil came—the thought brought a pang with it—and her bereavement for the time had broken her heart.

Phil's ministrations to her mother might be slightly mechanical, might have a core of hardness in their gentleness, but to her half-sister she devoted herself with a passionate gratitude for the sake of a father who while he lived had not been loved enough.

The widow presently reappeared in the world in the blackest of black crape, that made a wonderfully effective setting for her fair face, to which grief had given a touch of spirituality that



perhaps it had lacked before. She excited tenderness and pity wherever she went, especially in the hearts of various middle-aged and elderly gentlemen, who were not insensible to the fact that Johnny Featherstonehaugh had provided comfortably for his widow, and that there were only those two fine handsome girls to be thought of, whom no man with the heart of a man could possibly consider as encumbrances.

However, Mrs. Featherstonehaugh in her new character soon made it evident that it was of no use to sigh for her; and the gentlemen, who at first had been declaring her a deuced fine woman, added now disparagingly, "but too insensible, by Jove! More like a statue than a woman."

Phil resented somewhat her mother's arrogation of grief. As the years passed, and she kept the depth of her veil and her crape unshortened, Phil often thought to herself that her father would not have wished it. He had not counted his sacrifice vain since it had kept his wife in the sunshine. Now she seemed determined to clothe herself in night for his sake, who had rejoiced unselfishly in her beauty and her youth, in her untroubled mind, and in the fresh colors she wore so becomingly.

But however Phil might fume, reproaching herself the while, Mrs. Featherstonehaugh returned to her old well-pleased self no more. She gave up the society which she had adorned, and devoted herself to good works. Her drawing-rooms were now the meeting-places of various charitable societies. When that long last illness had gripped Johnny Featherstonehaugh he had been talking of moving to one of the Squares, since the Mall was too quiet and old-fashioned for his grown-up girls. Now that scheme was forgotten. None of them had ever really wanted to leave the Mall, with its big rooms and the walled-in garden full of fruit trees, a glorious old mulberry at its center. Now the place was dearer than ever from its associations, and there was no more talk of leaving it.

After a time the old friends returned. Mrs. Featherstonehaugh had not much time now for sociabilities. Her face shone like an



angel's, as once it had shone to Johnny Featherstonehaugh, in hospital wards and prison cells. She had no heart for society, and there were plenty of happier women to chaperon her girls wherever they would go.

"Johnny's death," said old Mr. Maxwell, of Mount Maxwell, "has been the salvation of his widow. I never gave her credit for so much character and so much heart."

Mrs. Maxwell puckered her brows under her cap with its cherry-colored ribbons, and smiled mysteriously as she handed her husband his second cup of tea.

"The new Columba is the old Columba," she said. "Her conduct has been a marvel of consistency straight through."

Mr. Maxwell dropped his newspaper and stared.

"I don't understand you, my dear. We used to agree that though a very sweet creature she wasn't half good enough for Johnny. Her pose about her first marriage, you remember, her air of having done Johnny an extraordinary favor in marrying him, her not knowing how unlike he was to other men in his devotion, her way of taking everything for granted. You have surely forgotten."

"I have forgotten nothing," said Mrs. Maxwell, waving away discussion, "and I maintain that Columba in her new attitude is perfectly consistent. There is no use in explaining. You are as blind as a bat, Dom, or as most of your sex where a woman and her ways are concerned."

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE CASTLE OF DREAMS.

COMMUNICATIONS between Castle O'Kelly and the Mall were frequent. The Misses O'Kelly had abundant leisure, and belonged to a day when letter-writing was still an art to be cultivated. Every week a budget in the minute French handwriting the ladies had learned at their convent school, came from one or the other



to their dear Columba. Visits were exchanged yearly between the two houses; and it was a great occasion when the Misses O'Kelly would arrive at the Mall dressed in the fashion of thirty years before, and with an incredible quantity of eggs and butter, oysters, newly caught trout, and perhaps a hare or a couple of grouse, to show their town relations what good things Connemara could produce.

Time had dealt lightly with the Misses O'Kelly. Finola, the plain-looking one, kept the dark hair and good teeth which had always been her best points. She could still endure an amazing amount of fatigue, trudging miles a day if need be, though the calendar declared her an old woman, and she certainly had not been young when her niece Columba left them.

Peggy had not lost her quaint, helpless prettiness. She had the oval face, the large eyes, and the ringlet over each shoulder of the Books of Beauty. The frills and furbelows of the sixties became Peggy's faded graces extremely well. She was a gentle creature, full of tender sentimentalities, and he would have been hard indeed who would have desired to wake her from her dreams of youth.

They were very dear and not at all ridiculous to their great-nieces. Perhaps, if anything, they loved Colombe the better of the two. It was impossible, when Mrs. Featherstonehaugh had become a woman of societies, for her to devote herself personally to her aunts as she had been used to do when they came to town for their annual fortnight. They could not miss her indeed, having the girls, she said; and the girls were right willing to devote themselves to the task of entertainment.

It was Colombe who discovered how Miss Peggy's heart yearned after the fashions and the shops, while the staidier Finola liked to improve her mind by a visit to a picture-gallery or a museum. It was Colombe who, with her French deftness, knew how to give Finola's garments the touch of sobriety which saved them from being ridiculous, and to tone down Peggy's muslins and roses to the same end.



The ladies never objected to Colombe doing what she liked with their belongings.

Mrs. Featherstonehaugh looked in on them one evening of long twilight to find the two young women and the two old women absorbed in fashion-papers and chiffons in the pretty room which Colombe's cleverness had fitted up as a sitting-room for herself and her sister.

Colombe was sitting on the floor, a thing she particularly liked to do, surrounded by a multitude of bits of pretty ribbon, feathers, flowers, and all manner of things. She was holding an airy creation of peach-colored chiffon in her hand, and contemplating it with pardonable pride.

"It is a little cap, mamma, for Aunt Peggy to wear at Mrs. Maxwell's party to-morrow evening. It is much prettier than one we saw in Grafton Street at a ruinous price, and see, this is Aunt Finola's fichu! Isn't it graceful?"

Columba smiled.

"They are very pretty, Colombe," she said.

"I wish you would have just such another cap as Aunt Peggy's. I am tired of that stiff white thing. Let me make you one, mamma."

Columba still smiled at the charming face. Colombe had the privileges of audacity.

"Not for me, child," she said. "I am content with my widow's cap so long as I live. Be content with dressing your aunts. The result is certainly very satisfactory."

She glanced at the soft fichus enfolding the Misses O'Kelly's spare forms, the lace about their wrists, the stately little caps where the hair had been wont to show unbecomingly thin. These had not been worn a day or two ago, and were Colombe's doings.

The ladies always deferred to Colombe's French taste, and accepted innovations at her hands, a suggestion of which from any one else had offended them.

"It seems a foolish thing to busy yourself with, Colombe," she said. "But you are young. Grave things may wait till you are older."



"Ah," said Colombe, "if I might choose my career! Do you know what it would be? I should choose to be lady's maid to a great lady, but not so great as to have a new frock for every day. I should love to make the old frocks new, so that madam need never wear the same thing twice. And I should like her not to be too handsome, so that *I* might make her beautiful."

"A poor ambition, child," said the mother, with her hand on the door-handle.

"It would be Colombe's way of ministering," said Phil; while the Misses O'Kelly listened, not altogether comprehending the spirit of the conversation.

Mrs. Featherstonehaugh had for some years left Castle O'Kelly unvisited. She preferred to remain in town most of the summer, though the moist heat of a cycle of hot summers was wont to wither her roses, and to make her look tired and faded when her daughters came back blooming from the Connaught bogs and their walking and riding, mountain-climbing and sea-fishing. She worked indefatigably during weather which made every living thing sleepy except the insect tribe, for to the fly and gnat peoples it seemed to impart a deadly energy.

Mrs. Featherstonehaugh wore her exhaustion and the black circles under her eyes with the air of a decoration. She had earned the right to them by her days and nights of work, her visiting the sick and poor in foul places, her devotion to the administrative work of her societies for which she had developed a passion. She liked to feel the contrast between herself and her girls, when they came back, sunburned, with firm, peachy cheeks and bright eyes. If she could she would not have had the summers a whit less exhausting so far as she personally was concerned; for her August and the seaside came all too soon.

There came a summer when the plans were somewhat changed. The Maxwells, who were devoted to Columba's girls, never having had any children of their own, had offered to take Phil and Colombe to Italy. They were to go in mid-May, and return before summer had loosed the tourist season upon the gray



churches, the picture-galleries, the olive and ilex groves, the vineyards and mountains, the rivered valleys.

It was exquisitely desirable, but June had always brought the annual visit to Castle O'Kelly, which extended to August when the Featherstonehaugh household left the Mall for Dalkey.

There was a generous rivalry between the two girls as to which should have the Italian tour. Neither thought of postponing Castle O'Kelly. Their visit was the great event of the year to their great-aunts. Something of the simplicity of children had remained with the Misses O'Kelly; and Phil had never forgotten how once, having telegraphed a postponement of her visit for a week, she had after all at the last moment been enabled to start as she had originally intended. Arriving unexpectedly she had found the two ladies seated at a board spread with the dainties which had been intended for herself, making no pretence at eating, but sad and silent. The patience of ten months could not endure a further probation of a week.

Phil remembered further the transformation which her unexpected coming had wrought. Now she would be no party to any postponement. Colombe must go with the Maxwells, and join her at Castle O'Kelly when she returned, and tell her all about it.

Colombe resisted for a time, but Phil had the stronger will. Unless she gave in of her own accord the victory was sure to be Phil's. In this case she did not give in; and she hardly felt a pang when she sent off Colombe, charming in a homespun travelling dress of gray-blue to see Italy with those dear old friends, the Maxwells.

A fortnight later she kissed her mother's cheek, bade her, somewhat uselessly, not to overwork till they came back in mid-August, to carry her for a brief, unwelcome respite to the seaside, sprang upon her outside car and a little later was leisurely running through the Bog of Allen in a train which gave its passengers time and to spare for all that was to be seen.

It was quite evening when she reached Castle O'Kelly, and a young moon was climbing up behind copper-colored clouds as the mail car dropped her at the cross roads where her aunts, with



gauze veils wisped round their pork-pie hats and the usual frilled frocks, were waiting to take her into their arms, and their little shandrydan of a governess cart.

"This is a pleasant change after the mail car," said Phil, settling herself into the little old vehicle, every lump and bump in the cushions of which she knew by heart.

"We always think the mail car so very comfortable," said Peggy, with a slightly disappointed air. Finola was so busy trying to make Tim Healy, the pony, start, that she could not take part in the conversation. "And Willie McGroarty is such an agreeable man, always ready to match a piece of ribbon in Galway, or bring us a bit of fresh meat, or do anything we ask him. You owe it to him that you'll have a little bit of mutton for your dinner, my dear."

"And a trout, I hope, Aunt Peggy. I'm very hungry after my thirty miles' drive, to say nothing of the endless train journey. Willie was most polite. I was delighted to see his curly head and beaming smile awaiting me at Mack's Hotel. Only I was the sole passenger, and the other side of the car was occupied with empty parcel-post hampers, so that that side was up in the sky, and my feet were trailing the ground all the time. I'd never have kept on only I'm used to sticking on. You remember the gray mare, Aunt Fin? Willie drove her Majesty's mail in fine style, and kept looking round now and again to ask me if I was keeping on at all, and to assure me that no one ever fell off his car, only English tourists, 'and the road does be covered with them.'"

"You poor child," said Miss Peggy, "I'm afraid you must have been very wretched. Did you hear, Finola? Phil's feet were dragging the ground the whole road from Galway."

"If the League hears of it they'll call it land grabbing," said her sister, abruptly. "Ah! that's right, Tim, my boy!" as the pony broke into a canter. "You've found out at last that I'm only taking you the way you like to go yourself. He's more like his namesake than ever, Phil, a hard one to drive and always has his own way."



"Paddy McNeill sent a basket of trout this morning when he heard you were coming," said Miss Peggy. "We couldn't very well refuse it, you know, though the fishing of the Carra has been let to a Mr. Lismore, a gentleman from the South. And the spring chickens are just coming in. We'll have plenty for you to eat, to say nothing of the mutton."

"I shan't grumble if I have trout—even poached trout,—and chickens," laughed Phil. "I think I'll let you and Aunt Fin eat up all the mutton."

Miss Peggy's face fell.

"Of course, my dear, you can have fresh meat whenever you like. We are apt to forget that it is such a treat to us. We can't get it, of course, unless we send to Galway, or sometimes when Mr. Featherstonehaugh kills a sheep and kindly sends us a present of a piece. Well, what matter? Father Tom is coming to dinner and Mr. Featherstonehaugh as well. We told them you'd be too tired, but they would come."

"I should never be too tired for Uncle Ralph and Father Tom," said Phil gayly. "I think it is like your selfishness to want to exclude them. The air is delicious here, just like wine."

"Here we are," said Miss Finola, drawing up at her own dilapidated gates. "Tim has done very well; a mile and a half in twenty-five minutes, and he wouldn't go at all for the first half of the journey. I think he's beginning to find out that he's got a firm hand over him."

"So he ought," said Phil. "He's twenty-five years old, and you broke him in yourself and have driven him ever since. He's a credit to the country—like his namesake. I say, Mrs. MacNally has got a new baby."

The lodge-woman, after vainly endeavoring to open the gates, had set down her baby on the grass, and was lifting them back.

"That's a very pretty baby, Mrs. MacNally," Phil called out, "and as fat as all his brothers and sisters. I hope you're well, Mrs. MacNally. I hope Pat has got a good job at the hay-making; and that Johnny's doing well at the school."



"Very well, Miss Phil," the woman called back, her sunburned face lighting up with pleasure. "Pat'll be proud to hear that you remembered him. He has grand wages where he is over in England for the hay harvest."

"Now, wasn't it very observant of Phil to notice Mrs. MacNally's baby?" said Miss Peggy to Miss Finola, with simple admiration. "That's what makes the people fond of you, my dear."

"I couldn't help it," said Phil, abashed, as at undeserved praise. "The baby was the very same age as the one Mrs. MacNally had last year; and of course I knew it couldn't be the same. That was last year's, I suppose, pulling at her skirt?"

"No, that was the one of the year before last. Last year's was sitting in the hamper by the door with the hen. He and the hen keep each other warm; and there's hardly a day of the year Mrs. MacNally hasn't got a fresh egg."

"That's a wrinkle to fowl-keepers," laughed Phil. "Mrs. MacNally must have a fine tribe of them now. I saw Four-Years-Old looking out of the window."

"Ah, indeed, the poor thing," said Peggy, "she has nine, all happy and healthy. As she says, God never sends a mouth to be fed but He sends something to put in it. But here's your old friend, Bodkin, coming out to welcome you. He's disappointed at Colombe not coming, but as he remarked, 'half a loaf's better than no bread.'"

The old man-servant, with hair white as though he powdered it about his rosy cheeks, came down to take Phil's modest luggage which had been piled up in a spare corner of the cart.

"'Tis good for sore eyes to see you, Miss Phil," he said. "We've all been longin' for the day, though we miss pretty Miss Colombe. I hope she's well, miss, and the mistress herself."

"All well, and Miss Colombe will be here just about the time that you begin to get tired of me, Bodkin."

"Sure that would be never, miss. Not but what we'll be glad to see her. I hope the ladies were in time for you. You never can depend on that Tim."



"Tim did very well indeed, Bodkin," said Miss Finola, standing up for her spoiled pet.

"It took me an hour and three-quarters st'alín' behind him round the fields wid a hatful of oats before I could coax him to me," grumbled the old man. "I didn't know but if he took a tantrum on the road, maybe the dinner 'ud be spoilt on yez."

"He went beautifully and he came back beautifully," said the pony's mistress.

"The mail car must have been after her time," said Bodkin unbelievably.

Phil had run up the steps and was kneeling down now, the center of a circle of affectionate dogs, licking and pawing her.

"She's as fond of the bastes as ever," went on old Bodkin. "An' see the sinse of them! The divil ever Tim 'ud have stirred a foot wid them trunks on his back if he hadn't known them for Miss Phil's. He's the aisiest offended baste ever I see in regard to what he'll consent to carry."

Up in the wide bare room which was hers by prescriptive right Phil stood by the open window and drew in long breaths of the sea and the mountain air.

Castle O'Kelly stood at the head of the glen on a plateau high in the hillside. Behind it tall slender woods, with trout streams leaping from boulder to boulder, climbed the mountain-side. In front the ground sloped steeply—green hillside fields, through which an avenue of the same slender birch and fir trees followed the line of a stream, till a mile away the fields had become level with the sea, and was a place of bog and salt marshes.

A tower at the corner of the house gave it its title of castle. It was older than the main building, and had rooms hollowed in its enormous masonry. Windows broken out to light the rooms gave the tower a homely aspect. It was entered from the house by a little door behind the tall clock case in the morning-room, a little door giving on an incredibly tiny and corkscrew stair-case. You might sit an hour in the morning-room and never discover that door, so tiny was it and so hidden.



The tower and its entrance had figured in all Phil's and Colombe's fairy-tales. It was the castle of the Sleeping Beauty, and the tower whence Rodhaver let down her hair. It stood in the garden to which the kind Beast brought his wedded Beauty; and it was the home of innumerable giants. In the morning-room there was a queer, ancient, damp smell, a sniff of which made Phil a child once more. She had only to shut her eyes and she was a lanky five-year-old child, sitting at the morning-room table of a wet day, and playing with Aunt Peggy's mother-o'-pearl reels and bobbins, the fascinating contents of the spinster's work-box, or ranging in order the wonderful Indian chessmen the same kind soul had produced for her delight.

Phil had still a fearsome pleasure in thinking of what it would be like to sleep in the tower. Not that she had ever dared it. Her room was in the pleasant, modern part of the house which had wide windows with green persiennés overlooking the little overgrown lawn and the walled garden full of apple trees at one side, and the delightful path of the river to the sea.

The room was scrubbed as white as freestone could make it, and had the luxury of a rag carpet, which Miss Peggy had learned how to make from an ancient volume, entitled, *The Lady's Friend*. The spindle-shanked dressing table, the little corner washstand with its jug and basin that did not match, the bed, the tall half-ruined chairs were islands on the sea of floor. But the place had an air austere and delicate. The Lady Poverty wore here her most winning aspect. The faded curtains were beautiful old chintz; the patchwork quilt which covered a bed of softest feathers, somewhat of a trial to Phil, fresh from her mattress, had delicious bits of brocade and organdie among its parts; a cracked china jug of lordly proportions stood full of roses and sweet-briar in the grate.

A bare, spiritual place full of sweetness of wind and flowers, it afforded the most refreshing slumbers Phil had known since she was a small child, when she had opened her eyes on the same ancient crucifix which was the sole adornment of the lofty walls.





“Phil had run up the stairs and was kneeling, the center of an affectionate circle of dogs, who were licking and pawing her.” P. 35.







## CHAPTER IV.

## THE STORM.

OLD Mr. Featherstonehaugh took in Miss Peggy as by prescriptive right to dinner. Father Tom Kirwan went first with her sister. Phil had perforce to go in alone.

"Never mind, Phil," said Father Tom, sparkling at the girl he had known from babyhood through his gold-rimmed glasses, "you won't be long without a bachelor. There is one on his way this minute to show the Dublin bucks how dull they are."

"I always thought Castle O'Kelly grew everything nice but bachelors," said Phil, settling cheerfully to her grilled trout, whose pink flesh showed most appetizingly through his charred skin. Had not Father Tom the immemorial right of the Irish country priest to be jocular with young folk?

"You're right there, Phil," said the priest. "If I was depending on the marriage fees to keep me, I'd be in worse condition to-day. I haven't had a marriage this twelvemonth that could pay me half-a-crown."

"But who is the bachelor?" asked Phil.

"Ah, I thought that would interest her"—in a gay aside to the elderly folk. "He is a very good-looking lad, and a college-bred gentleman, as they say in these parts. He is fairly well endowed with this world's goods, and has a pretty spot of his own on the Shannon. Let alone that, he's a good lad, the pride and hope of his widowed mother."

"Too satisfactory by half," said Phil. "Has he no faults?"

"I'll leave you to find them out; and his virtues in detail."

"Oh, I'm not interested."

"Wait till you see him, Phil!"

"Who is he, Father Tom?" put in Miss Finola.

"He's the new tenant of Mr. Blake O'Hara's shooting-lodge at Acton, Ross Lismore. His mother happens to be an old friend of mine, and I've known the boy since his infancy, though perhaps my reports of him reach me from a somewhat prejudiced source."



"That's better," said Phil, with a pretended sigh of relief. "Of course his mother would make the best possible of him."

"I'm glad he is pleasant," said Miss Peggy. "It is so disagreeable when one can not be neighborly with the neighbors."

"It's not in you to ostracize any one, ma'am, though I wouldn't answer for Miss Fin," said the priest, who always viewed the Misses O'Kelly with a certain tender amusement.

"Peggy can be very stiff and cold when she likes," interjected Miss Finola. "You always ascribe all the bad qualities to me, Father Tom."

"Who'd have a better right, considering how long I've known you?" said the priest.

"I'm glad Acton is to be occupied," said Mr. Featherstonehaugh. "I've missed a man to shoot with and smoke with since Blake O'Hara left the place empty."

"Aye," said the priest sympathetically. "'Tis hard on you. I often wondered what kept you in these wilds at all, at all, with not an adult male able to do more than read his letters except yourself and myself and Parson Thornhill. Thornhill is a good fellow, and plenty of time to spare, seeing that himself and his congregation and the clerk and the sexton only make six all told. 'Tis a thousand pities Thornhill isn't a bit nearer to us."

"He'd be a hand too many for whist," said Mr. Featherstonehaugh, comforting himself for what couldn't be helped.

"Miss Peggy would always stay out—wouldn't you, ma'am? She'd be quite happy watching your hand, Featherstonehaugh. Not like Miss Fin, that must always have a hand in everything."

"The young gentleman will make one too many," said Miss Finola, passing by Father Tom's playful jest at her expense.

"Not while your niece is here, ma'am. Would he be wasting his time playing cards with a pair of fogies like me and Featherstonehaugh? He'll take Phil off our hands. We sha'n't have to be doing the polite to her any longer."

"As though you ever did the polite to me in all your life, Father Tom!" said Phil, indignantly.



"When is Lismore coming?" asked Mr. Featherstonehaugh.

"He's on his way now. I heard from his mother to-day. He's taking the yacht round. She'll lie in Croagh Harbor. He ought to be somewhere off the coast of Clare to-night."

"O dear, I hope he'll have fine weather. It looked rather threatening to-night," said Miss Peggy, who was full of soft goodwill and concern for all the children of Adam.

"Those purple clouds over Slieve Carn did look rather threatening," said the priest. "Only for Phil, and that you made such a point of it, Miss Fin, I'd have been after postponing dining with you till to-morrow."

"You know, Father Tom, I really asked you for to-morrow, but you said you'd rather come to-night, lest I'd change my mind before to-morrow."

"So you did, now I think of it. Never mind my jokes, Miss Fin. I'll likely have a sick call to-night when I go back, and have to take the bridle-path over Slieve Carn. Sure it isn't minding thunder and lightning I'd be."

"Ah," said Miss Peggy, "there's the wind getting up. It will blow us those thunderclouds sure enough."

"It won't come before morning," said Father Tom. "It will be a summer storm, short and sudden. I'll likely be back from poor Andy Kelleher before it breaks."

"Oh," said Miss Peggy, "I hope so. I shouldn't like to think of you on Slieve Carn in the storm."

"'Tis the Lord's business, ma'am," said the priest, with sudden gravity, "and the storm is His."

Then his face grew merry again.

"Maybe if I had a curate, 'tis sending him I'd be in my place," he said.

"If you had, you'd be killing yourself with work all the same," said Miss Finola.

"Maybe the Bishop knows me better than you, ma'am, and that's why he won't give me a curate."

The wind suddenly swept up the valley with a shriek, fled about



the gables of Castle O'Kelly as though some spirit were in pursuit of it, clapped its wings an instant overhead, and then suddenly was still.

"I remember a storm once in June," said Miss Finola. "It was the time the American liner went ashore off Carndhu Point. It came like this after a month of hot weather. It was as bad as any winter storm I ever remember. The wind nearly unroofed the village, and it was a fortunate thing that there had been an immense haul of mackerel a few nights before, so that the men were curing all they could and none of the boats were out. A big wave, like a tidal-wave, took up the boats that were lying on the beach—for no one thought of a great storm in midsummer—and smashed them like matchwood. The nets that had been drying in the sun were torn to pieces where they were not carried away. I remember the distress the following winter. Our dear father was alive then."

"Ah, ma'am," said the priest, "we who have lived long enough have all sad things in our memories."

The wind shrieked and clapped again, and suddenly the gray dusk outside the window flashed white.

"It is sheet lightning," said Mr. Featherstonehaugh, rising to draw the blinds. "There is no thunder with it."

As he came back to the table he laid a reassuring hand on Miss Peggy's, which were clasped in her lap. She was always frightened in a thunderstorm.

As though to contradict him, a rattle and roar of thunder followed the lightning. Hard upon it came the shrieking of the wind.

"We were caught on Lough Heagh once in a storm like this, when I was young," said Miss Finola. "We were all but capsized, only fortunately the wind seized the sail of our little yacht and tore it to rags and tatters. The yacht righted herself then, and we were driven on to the shore. I have never cared to be in a yacht since."

Miss Peggy had been sitting with her eyes covered with one



hand. The other was held firmly clasped in Mr. Featherstonehaugh's. No one thought it strange: the old couple had so long been lovers.

Now she spoke without uncovering her eyes.

"That poor boy is out in the storm," she said, in an awed whisper. "I dread those yachts. And there are terrible cliffs along the coast."

"The Lord bring him safely," said Miss Fin.

"Amen!" added Father Tom. "But he wouldn't thank us for spoiling our dinner on his account. I'd like another slice off the leg, Miss Fin. Featherstonehaugh, make Miss Peggy drink a glass of the port. 'Tis the wrong time for it, but she looks as if she'd come to the end of her dinner."

Mr. Featherstonehaugh poured out a glass of the port. It was from his own cellar, nearly the last of a precious brand. He held it to Miss Peggy's lips, and she drank it. Meanwhile Bodkin had come in and shut the shutters and lit the lamps.

"The storm's travellin' away from us round the mountains," he said, with the familiarity of an old servant, and an Irish servant to boot. "The worst of it is over, Miss Peggy, let alone that I've shut it out."

As he changed the plates, he muttered to himself:

"It'll come back by way of the same mountains before mornin', or I know nothin' about the ways of it."

The thunder was certainly more distant, crashing and tearing among the amphitheater of hills. Miss Peggy presently uncovered her eyes, and sat very pale, averting her gaze from the windows, which in spite of the shutters showed running lines of light every instant.

After dinner they adjourned to the drawing-room. Heavy rain had followed upon the thunder, and the wind seemed to have fallen, or the roar of the rain had drowned its voice.

Phil lingered a moment behind the rest to gaze from the staircase window upon the storm. Green lightning lit the valley as she looked. She saw the groaning trees lashed to earth. Under the



window at which she stood she saw cattle and sheep huddled to the house as if for protection and companionship. The air was full of the steady rush of falling waters, till the thunder tore the duller sound with a ripping and crackling noise. Out at sea she saw capes and cliffs in sudden prominence, then plunged back in darkness. The young moon was dead, drowned in the floods, perhaps. The river was racing down the valley, all curls and swirls of foam, as the lightning revealed it.

They were playing a game of whist half-heartedly in the drawing-room.

Phil seated herself at the piano, and began to play something with crashing chords, a wild, troubled thing by a new Hungarian composer that harmonized strangely well with the cries of the storm. While she played she thought of the Atlantic as she had seen it revealed by the lightning, and she was afraid.

Suddenly she was aware that Father Tom was standing behind her. The first game of the rubber had been played, and Miss Fin was leisurely shuffling the cards preparatory to her deal.

"Play something lively, Phil," he said. "'Planxty Kelly,' or 'The Wind that Shakes the Barley.' I don't like those new music-makers of yours. They belong to a world left alone."

"You feel it?" said Phil, surprised. "It seemed to come naturally to my fingers. It has the desolation of the sea and the wind in it. Tell me, Father Tom—one has to think of all souls at sea a night like this—your friend, Mr. Lismore, he is an expert yachtsman?"

"You take after your Aunt Peggy," said the priest, without a hint of the old raillery. "Be easy, child! He is an expert yachtsman. He has lived half his life on sea, and is accustomed to take the yacht around our rocky coasts. Besides, the storm may not have struck him. Our mountains often draw the storms to them. And if it has, the wind is in his favor."

"The cards are dealt, Father Tom," called Miss Finola, as Phil broke into the irresistible dance-music of "The Wind that Shakes the Barley." But while her fingers flew hither and thither over



the keys, and the mad merriment of the music answered the thunder, Phil, looking straight before her, saw another vision than the high back of the ancient piano, with her great-grandmother's framed sampler above it.

Why should the possible peril of a stranger have such power to trouble her? Her vision was of Ross Lismore's yacht driven before the gale, drifting on to the treacherous rift of rocks outside Croagh Harbor, dashed to pieces against the wall of impenetrable cliff that lay to north and southward of the little bay.

The thunder had died away in distance before she slept, but the vision of the yacht and the cries of drowning men disturbed her dreams.

She awoke somewhere in the early morning, to find that the storm had returned to them around the amphitheater of hills with tenfold violence. The peals of thunder and the incessant flashes of chain and forked lightning were sufficient to account for the terror which had set her heart beating in the appalling fear and horror of dreams.

But it was not the storm had awakened her. Her Aunt Finola was standing by the bedside, shaking her by the shoulder.

"Wake up, Phil," she said. "You've had a nightmare, and have been groaning horribly. I'm not surprised. Wake up, dear. There's a vessel coming ashore off Croagh; we are afraid she will be wrecked."

Phil sprang out of bed as another flash of lightning lit the room.

"I've been dreaming of it," she said, beginning to dress herself. "Is the village awake?"

"I don't know. Ralph Featherstonehaugh is going to see what can be done. No boat could live in such a storm. How lucky he stayed last night!"

"Is Aunt Peggy by herself?"

"She is fast asleep. I had been up with her. She was so much disturbed that I was obliged to give her Dr. MacNevin's composing draught. I don't think she will wake."



"They will have no provision for shipwrecked men in the village. They had better be brought here. Have fires lit and plenty of blankets ready, Aunt Fin."

"But you, child?"

"I am going with Uncle Ralph."

"In this storm? Are you mad, Phil?"

"The storm is nearly spent and I do not fear it in the least. Send Bodkin after us with the cart and some blankets. You have a bottle of brandy, Aunt Fin?"

"Ralph Featherstonehaugh does not believe a soul will be saved. You will be exposing yourself uselessly, Phil."

"I must be there all the same."

Phil was donning a soft tweed cap by this time. She had dressed with lightning quickness.

"Don't be frightened, Aunt Fin," she said. "See, the storm is dying away! And there is the first whiteness of dawn in the East. I think we shall save life. Forgive me for going against your will, Aunt Fin. You know I am not the useless sort or I should not dream of inflicting myself on those who were ready to help."

A few minutes more and Phil, with her hands in her pockets and her cap pressed down over her eyes, was racing through the avenue of trees that led to the low-lying land and the village. She knew every step of it even in the dark, but it was lit now and again by the lightning that was traveling away beyond the range of mountains.

"I had to come, Uncle Ralph," she said, thrusting her hand suddenly through the arm of Mr. Featherstonehaugh, who was standing, the center of a group of fishermen, watching the wreck.

"Ah, is it you, Phil?" he said, without surprise. "I'm sorry you've come, my girl. This is going to be a bad job—a bad job, I'm afraid. Women had better be out of it."



## CHAPTER V.

## THE WRECK.

THE vessel was between the reef and the cliffs. She had drifted through a gap in the reef, to be the plaything of the churning waves between it and the treacherous bed of sand that lay below the terrible rock-face of the cliffs of Carndhu. She looked a little thing and frail to withstand even for a moment the tremendous forces that were set against her. Now she came on head foremost against the sands, was sucked up with the waves, and then sent rushing back against the reef behind. It was like the play of giants with a child.

The group of watching men and women stood huddled together in the gray dawn on that bed of sand below Carndhu. To the left of them lay the little harbor and the fishing village, with a starveling ray of light in every window. No one was at home except the very old and the sick and the young children. Looking round on the familiar faces, strange in the cold, creeping light, Phil recognized nearly all the inhabitants of the village—women with shawls over their heads, men with soft caps pulled down on their brows, every face looking one way.

“What do you make her out to be, Phelimy?” asked Mr. Featherstonehaugh of the oldest of the fishermen.

“As near as I can say a sailing vessel of about ten tons, your honor. There isn’t many like her comes our way. As like as not she’s got blown out of her course.”

“It’s the yacht Father Tom spoke about,” said Phil, against her uncle’s ear. “Can nothing be done, Uncle Ralph?”

“Look for yourself, child,” Mr. Featherstonehaugh said, pointing to the yeasty stretch of waters. “No boat such as we have could live ten minutes in such a sea.”

“And there is no life-boat,” she groaned.

“None within five miles of us. The vessel will be gone to pieces long, long before a message could reach them.”

“Are they to perish there?” said Phil, shivering by his side.



"There is only one chance," he said, "and we are waiting for that. If the boat grounds, some of them may be washed up still alive. We shall have to fight the waves for them, but there are plenty of men here ready to do that."

"Aye, for sure, sir," said Phelimy. "We won't let them be drowned before our eyes if we can help it."

"What will they do, Uncle Ralph?"

He looked down at her face, pale, and wet with sea-spray.

"Look along the rope, Phil, and you will see."

"Ah!" She peered through the steadily growing light and understood. The fishermen, whom she had imagined to be standing aimlessly grouped, had, she saw now, for a center, nine or ten strong fellows roped together with a stout rope. They were standing at the edge of the waves.

The nearest man, who was Phelimy's son, Con, a great, brawny, kindly giant, turned to smile at her. He had rather guessed at than heard her words.

"I think she'll ground soon, miss," he said. "Then they'll fling themselves overboard. 'Tisn't waitin' to be caught by the masts they'll be. They'll come on then wid the waves, an' meself an' these other boys'll be out there to meet them, an' bring them in alive, if it's the will of God."

"God grant it, Con!" said Phil, fervently. "Can any one see how many are aboard?"

"There'll be three or four, by the size of her; but we can see nothin' by this light—'tis worse than the dark almost. She was showin' a light whin first we caught sight of her. Now 'tis gone; washed out of her wid the say, I suppose."

"God bless the work!" said a voice at her elbow. She turned and saw Father Tom Kirwan.

"This is a terrible business," he said. "I've only just got back from the sick-call to poor Kelleher. I came as soon as I heard there was a wreck."

"Oh, Father Tom," said Phil. "Do you suppose it is your friend's yacht?"



"I've been thinking of it, child; it may be. Vessels of that size aren't common along the coast, nor any vessels bigger than fishing-smacks, for the matter of that. Poor Grace Lismore! He's an only son, Phil. Ah, well, well; sure he's in the hands of God!"

He left them and went toward the line of men. Looking after him, Phil noticed the eager faces turned to him. She was hardly surprised to see the men who were roped together fall on their knees. She saw his hands uplifted with a gesture of absolution. Then the men were on their feet again.

"They will go the happier for that, poor lads," he said, returning to Phil's side.

They stood for a few minutes longer watching the vessel, less ghostly as the daylight widened, drifting helplessly before the wind and the waves. Now and again a sharp cry broke from one of the women, or a muttered exclamation from one of the men. Phelimy presently announced that with the aid of an old glass he had found out that there were three men and a boy on board, steadying themselves by the mast.

"They'll take to the water for it," he said, "the minit they get near enough. Steady, boys, for I think the next big wave'll lodge her in the sand."

He had no need for the admonition. Looking along the line of men, which was now extending out into the water, Phil saw the quiet, easy-going, placid faces she knew set toward the wreck, grim as iron.

She turned to speak to Father Tom, but there was a shout from the people about her. An enormous wave was rushing toward the sands, carrying the vessel with it as though it were a splinter of wood. Another instant, and, with the attitude of a charging bull, she came on, plunging bow foremost, and embedding herself deep in the sand. There was a shrill scream, a sound like the cracking of many timbers; then the line of men was far out in the foam, their heads bobbing about like so many corks when they could be seen, though the spray hid them for the greater part.



Phil, clinging to her uncle's arm, gripped it more tightly than she knew. For an instant she could not breathe: the sound of many waters in her ears seemed to deafen and confuse all her senses. Then the grim line of men on the beach holding the rope came into her consciousness again. Around her there was a deadly silence. There was not a cry from the women. They were watching their men in the trough of the sea. Father Tom stood with his hands raised, as though he would draw mercy upon his people.

Then the rope grew taut. They were hauling in the line. Gasping and half-drowned, the rescuing party were dragged back to shore. What had they brought out of the sea? Every one crowded about them. Con Hogan was dragging something with him—something that lay horribly limp and helpless. Another of the men had his hands in a boy's hair.

Hastily the men were relieved of their burdens, and Phil, pressing into the group, saw a young man lying stretched on the sand. Father Tom was leaning over him, and she heard a sharp cry break from his lips. She did not need to be told that it was a cry of recognition.

"His head is hurt," said the priest. "Some of the wreckage must have struck him."

He lifted his hand, and there was blood on it.

"I think I can make a bandage," said Phil.

She wondered at her own coolness. Turning to Mr. Featherstonehaugh, she asked him for his handkerchief.

"It is the best we can do for the present," she said, folding the big white silk muffler, and bandaging the unconscious head. "Of course, there must be a doctor as soon as possible."

She kept her arm under the head after she had bandaged it. Kneeling so, she handed the brandy-flask to the priest.

"Ah," he said, "it was well done to bring this. Now, lift his head a little."

She did as he bade her, and he got some brandy between the clenched teeth. Then he handed the flask to Mr. Featherstonehaugh, who did the like with the boy.



"We must get them out of these wet things and to a fire at once. Aunt Fin will have everything ready," Phil said.

The priest lifted his head. He had been feeling for any pulsation in the drowned man. Now his face was lit up with hope.

"I think he is living," he said. "I am certain I felt his heart beat."

The day had come now in a green dawn that made the faces of the drowned and the watchers almost equally ghastly.

Phelimy Hogan was kneeling, chafing the feet, which he had stripped and laid in one of the women's shawls. He was holding them to his breast with a curious womanly tenderness. As Phil looked at him, oddly struck by it, he looked back at her, and his old eyes burned through tears.

"We know how to trate drowned people," he said. "We're used to it. I remember a mornin' like this, an' a boy like this, just about the age o' this wan. He was my eldest. He'd be twenty-eight come Lady Day if he'd lived—Lady Day in harvest; that was the day he came home. I sat just like this, warmin' his feet in my breast an' rubbin' them wid my hands; but I couldn't get them warm—the cowld of death was in them. I was glad his mother was gone then. Mothers do be terrible fond of th' eldest one, Miss Phil."

"This is an only son," Phil said, leaning toward him. She felt even her sympathy frozen. "And his mother a widow. Will he live, Phelimy?"

"His feet is limber enough; not like Patrick's. I think he'll come to."

"And the others?"

Phil looked out on the gray-green waste of waters, still flinging their angry crests toward heaven.

"The others 'll maybe be flung up here in a day or two, if the tide doesn't carry them out to say. We may be thankful for what is. If the rope had bruk now, I'd have been a childless man."

They lifted the two figures into the cart, where they lay side by side, their faces turned to the cold light and their figures horribly



straight and rigid. A messenger had already been despatched by a short cut over the mountain to fetch a doctor. The little sad procession climbed up the hill-road then—Phil, the priest, and Mr. Featherstonehaugh walking by the side of the cart, Bodkin leading the pony.

“You are sure you felt his heart beat?” Phil said to the priest, for again and again the fear returned to her, looking at the rigid shapes in the cart.

“I am sure of it,” he replied. “They were not long in the water, though there was enough sea to drown them a hundred times over. Let us get them to a fire, and we shall do everything possible till the doctor comes.”

In a very little while they were before a roaring fire in the best bedroom of Castle O’Kelly, laid on mattresses, and with hot bottles to their feet. Phil kept her head where most other girls would have lost it, and having once, in a moment of energy which had no outlet, entered her name for a course of ambulance lectures, she knew what to do. Father Tom looked at her using artificial respiration upon the boy with approval. He was doing the same for Ross Lismore.

“Come here,” he said at last, “and I will take your place. This one is coming to. You have had nearly enough of kneeling.”

Phil was indeed cramped from her long kneeling by the mattress. She got up and gave place to Father Tom. Then she moved slowly across to the place he had left. A great change had taken place in the young man’s face—the rigid lines had relaxed; softness and color had returned to it. While she looked at it the eyes opened and rested on her an instant. Then an effort at recognition struggled in them. The lips opened to speak.

“You are to be quiet,” she said, leaning down to him. “You have been in the sea, but you are all right now.”

He lay still a minute with his eyes half closed. Then his hand wandered uncertainly toward his head.

“The mast must have struck you,” she explained, “when it fell. That is where you feel hurt.”



A film as of sleep fell again on his eyes and the lids closed.

"I think he will do," she said, returning to the others. "This is a worse case."

"I don't know," Father Tom whispered back. They still talked as if they were in a death-chamber. "I think this one will be all right. Poor Ross's broken head will, I am afraid, be slow of mending."

"I can't think of anything now," said Phil, "except that both of them live. Let the future take care of itself."

"Or God take care of the future," said Father Tom, gravely, never slackening his exertions.

Indeed, by the time Dr. Tuomy had reached them, the little cabin-boy was in a sound, healthy slumber, which promised to set him well on the road to convalescence ere it should be disturbed. Ross Lismore's was a much more serious case. For some time the doctor would not commit himself to an opinion about him, but talked seriously of having a specialist called; of possible complications, and the necessity, perhaps, of having an operation performed. However, he grew more hopeful as the days passed, though to Phil and the others it seemed a terribly unhopeful outlook at times, judging from the patient's long unconsciousness and the pallor which was hardly like life.

Only a day passed before Mrs. Lismore was by her son's bedside. Father Tom had offered his old friend the hospitality of his house, but this the Misses O'Kelly would not hear of her accepting.

"The O'Kellys may have come down in the world," said Miss Fin, "but they haven't yet reached the point of refusing shelter to the mother of a sick man whom God has placed in their charge."

"'Twould be a disgrace to us forever," said Miss Peggy, who was still ashamed of herself because she had slept through the storm and the rescue, and a little resentful because her quiet pulses had not been stirred by witnessing the bravery of those who had accomplished the saving of the two lives from the yacht.

After all, the hospitality of Castle O'Kelly was not so much taxed as it might have been, for the cabin-boy, quite well again



but immensely consequential, was already on his way home to the town of Limerick.

"You could as aisy drown a herrin'," said Bodkin, who was intolerant of boys and their pranks and their mischievous ways, "an' you couldn't crack the skull of him, not if you dropped him over the side of Carndhu. If you could, there wouldn't be many min left alive in the world."

"I quite agree with you that boys have a special Providence all to themselves, Bodkin," laughed Phil, who was light-hearted that day because for the first time Dr. Tuomy had not shaken his head over Ross Lismore.

"There's eleven more of his sort where he comes from," lamented Bodkin. "But you see 'tisn't him that unlucky ould mast 'ud hit a welt to. I dare say 'tis the long face his mother 'll pull when she sees him walkin' in to her so bould an' impident, an' so proud of his drowndin'."

"Indeed, I don't think she will at all," said Phil. "It isn't the way of mothers. I dare say she'd make as much fuss over losing one of the eleven as though she had only one."

"Indeed, I dare say she would," said Bodkin. "Wimin is terrible quare. 'Tis their ways, an' the thought o' the childher makes me glad I'm a single man."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE CONVALESCENT.

MRS. LISMORE settled down into the life at Castle O'Kelly as though she had always belonged to it. She was the gentlest of the gentle, a meek little woman with innocent, faded eyes, and a sweet and sensitive mouth. Even her son's danger she took quietly. It was conceivable of her that she would bear the worst trouble while blessing the Hand that dealt it, and that no sorrow of hers would ever burden other people.

She was an ideal sick nurse, and after she had come in, without





*“Thinking over these things, Phil had a sudden sense of some one’s eyes being upon her.” P. 58.*







taking off her bonnet, and interviewed Dr. Tuomy by her son's bedside, he talked no more of the necessity for having a trained nurse to attend to his patient.

Yet, after all, it was not on his mother's face that Ross Lismore first opened his eyes after weeks of wandering in some unknown region.

Mrs. Lismore was out for air and exercise, and it was Phil's turn to be on guard. She was sewing something soft and white. Phil, for the life of her, couldn't turn a bow or adjust a drapery, as Colombe did with an inborn genius. But it was one of her unexpected and charming femininities—unexpected because Phil had somehow the air of a frank and pleasant boy—that she had a passion for fine needle-work. That and minute darning—her darning of Castle O'Kelly's old damask table-linen was something exquisite—were her delights; whereas Colombe would fain have dispensed with the needle altogether, if she might, in the making of her delicious loops and bows, and where she must use it put in stitches which were Phil's derision and horror.

It was a pleasant, warm July day, and the room was full of the scent of a sweet-briar hedge below the window. That and the perfume of sweet peas, of which there was a basinful somewhere in the room, mingled delightfully with the sharp, acetic absence of smell, which is the expression of absolute cleanliness and unlimited fresh air.

Phil was thinking, as she put in her little stitches, of a letter received from Colombe that morning. It was full of a certain Piers Vanhomeigh, who had been a very frequent visitor to the house on the Mall—a fresh, frank, winning boy who had been Colombe's lover from time immemorial. His name occurred constantly in the letters from Colombe. How could it be otherwise, indeed, seeing that he dogged Colombe's footsteps so persistently? He had even followed her abroad, turning up at Venice, to the great pleasure of Mrs. Maxwell, who was as fond of curly-haired Piers as every one else was.

Phil had knit her brows in a little line of anxious thought over



the letter. Over and over Piers had pressed his suit on Colombe, taking her "No" with a light-heartedness which refused to be depressed by it. Colombe was very fond of Piers, but not in that way—not in that way at all.

She had had her fancies. What girl except the dullest dullard comes to six-and-twenty without having experienced the thrills and tremors, the agonies and exaltations, which are the delightful heritage of youth? But they had been for men older than herself, grave and reverend persons, to whom sunny and dancing Colombe had the charm of an exquisite child. These little affairs had not hurt her. They were rootless, and when they withered Colombe had laid them by, like so many sweet-smelling things, in her memory.

Piers waited patiently through them all. Colombe's complaint of Piers was, indeed, that he was too patient. But now Piers had turned angry, she complained, and because Piers was angry Phil carried those lines of thought in her forehead. She had always taken it for granted that Colombe would say "Yes" one day, instead of "No." Piers was all that was desirable and suitable for Colombe, and had behind that sunny way of his a great reserve both of will and heart. He knew Colombe as well as Phil did, even better than Phil, perhaps; for with a full knowledge of the slight lightness and selfishness which Johnny Featherstonehaugh and Phil had refused to accept in those last sacred thoughts together, he yet somehow expected more from Colombe than Phil did. Perhaps his belief that Colombe had not yet reached her full growth in character was the truth after all.

But now what had Colombe been doing to him that after his limitless patience he should have left her in anger? Phil was impatient with Colombe, as one is with the wilful inanities of a beloved child. She would hurt herself one day, and then she would be sorry forever.

Thinking over these things, Phil had a sudden sense of some one's eyes being upon her. She looked up sharply. A pair of brown eyes in a haggard young face were gazing on her without



surprise. Consciousness was quite awake at last. Reason once again looked at her in that gaze.

"Why, you are awake!" she said, brightly. "This will be good news for every one, your mother most of all."

"I remember you," he said, picking the words out slowly, "the time I was hurt."

"Ah, yes. You will soon be all right again. But you mustn't think or talk yet. Do you think you could take a little broth? You've got to be fattened now."

She slipped a hand under his head, and lifted it a little, carefully. Then she held the strong, reviving broth to his lips. He drank it slowly, and smiled as she laid him down again.

"Are you a nurse?" he asked.

"For the present. You'll find out about me later on. Now rest. Your mother will be coming in presently. She will be so happy to see you like this."

He closed his eyes obediently, while Phil resumed her sewing. The only sounds in the quiet room were the passage of the thread through the linen and the humming of a little mountain-bee which had found its way into the masses of sweet-pea.

Presently Mrs. Lismore came in, soft-footed. Phil turned to her with a finger on her lips for quietness.

"What do you think?" she whispered. "He is conscious again. He has spoken."

"Thank God!" said the mother, under her breath.

"It ought to have been to you first. But it was my luck. He looked quite himself when I lifted my eyes from my sewing to find him awake. I gave him his broth and made him go asleep again. I think he looks better already—quite bonny."

The two women gloated over the haggard face on the pillow. "Bonny" was hardly the word. A four weeks' beard was on the hollow cheeks. The hair had been cut quite away around the wound, which, although it had closed, had left an unsightly cicatrix till the hair should cover it. A moment they stood so in silence. The elder woman's hand had caught the younger's in a moment of joy



and gratitude. It was an unusual demonstration for Mrs. Lismore to make, for she did not find it easy to give expression to the thankfulness which was in her heart toward those who had given her and hers such hospitality and sympathy in their hour of need. Ross Lismore slept on as quietly as a child.

It was not long before he was able to be moved first to a sofa, then to the veranda outside, which, with the green persiennes, gave the modern part of Castle O'Kelly the look of an Italian villa.

He had only to rest and be quiet, Dr. Tuomy said, to be as strong as ever in a little time. It had been a beautiful wound from the doctor's point of view, clean-cut as though a sword had inflicted it, and it had mended handsomely, without leaving mischief behind.

"But there must be no traveling for a man with a cracked skull," he said, "even though he comes of a race accustomed to cracked skulls. Perfect rest and perfect quiet for at least six weeks to come; and I really think he couldn't have come to a better place for these things."

"But—but—is it fair to our hosts? And there is no way of making it up to them," groaned Mrs. Lismore.

"Oh, bedad, ma'am, if you want to make them your enemies for life, you'll talk about encroaching on their hospitality. I wouldn't mention it to Miss O'Kelly myself, though I've seen service, and have never felt inclined to run away. Put it out of your head, ma'am. Never was hospitality so willingly given."

"I know it, doctor; but—but we must rather strain their resources."

"You couldn't make Castle O'Kelly much poorer than it is. Still, they're not pinched, in the vulgar way. How could they be, with those streams full of trout and the place running wild with hens and chickens, and the garden full of fruit? Then, they have Featherstonehaugh to look after them. They'll want for nothing while he lives. There, ma'am, don't trouble yourself." He laid a kindly hand on the little woman's shoulder. "Take what's cheerfully given, as you would give it yourself."



So Mrs. Lismore was restrained from getting the O'Kelly pride up in arms, and puzzled her gentle head during her son's days of convalescence by wondering in what way she could render kindness to her new friends. Indeed, as the days passed, she felt her obligation less and less of a burden. A burden in the vulgar sense it could not be: the Misses O'Kelly made it so simply evident that the presence of their guests was a great event and delight in their quiet lives. Only the thought that they were poor yet fretted Mrs. Lismore. The old-fashioned and much-mended garments, the threadbare carpets, the transparent curtains, the napery held together by fine darning—these were so many hurts to the grateful friend who had come to love them.

Ross Lismore was now almost restored to his old good looks. It is doubtful if at this time Phil ever thought of him as an agreeable young man whose society a young woman would naturally feel a pleasant thing. They had all got into such a habit of making him the center of their thoughts while he was still very ill, that it was almost with amazement that Phil heard him one day forbid her to fetch him something—a novel, or his pipe, or something he had looked for and had not found at hand.

"I am going to wait on you," he said, "for the rest of the time. It is quite time that things resumed their proper aspect."

"It will be delightful," said Phil. "Just as delightful and surprising as when a child one has done things for begins to do them in return."

"I believe you would all have liked to keep me on my back ever so much longer," he said. "It is extraordinary what pleasure you women find in service."

"I have not rendered service of that kind to any one—for a long time," said Phil, thinking of her father.

He watched her wistfully, with a sense that she needed comfort, but not knowing what to say. In a moment or two she smiled at him, her own bright, rallying smile.

"Don't you feel tremendously independent?" she asked.



"Awfully glad," he said, with a heartfelt sincerity, "to be able to do things for myself again."

Her eyes reproached him.

"I mean the things you couldn't do, Miss Featherstonehaugh. You all did the other things a thousand times better than I deserved. But—but—I must have looked an awful scarecrow before I was able to do things for myself. That first day now, when I opened my eyes on you sewing there—didn't I look awful?"

"You looked lovely, because you were mending."

"Lovely!" he groaned. "That is the professional point of view, like Dr. Tuomy's pleasure in my cut head. I assure you, Miss Featherstonehaugh, the first time my mother consented to my looking in the glass I all but dropped it."

"And yet women are supposed to monopolize the vanities!"

"That is ungrateful of you, for it was of you I thought. 'Great Heavens!' said I, 'what a jail bird I must have looked in her eyes!'"

Phil laughed out in enjoyment.

"And your grief was wasted after all. When your mother had come in, and you were fallen asleep, we stood by your pillow and rejoiced in your good looks."

He laughed a little ruefully.

"My mother would do that. But you—I should think you would avert your eyes from such an object unless—unless you took the professional point of view."

"Ah, that was it. It was the professional point of view. I was so delighted when you opened your eyes."

"I thought I should never get to a razor again after that peep in the glass. It was like the vision of waters to a thirsting man in the desert. There—what will you think of me? I am very grateful to be alive. And to think those poor lads of mine were drowned!"

"You must not think about that. Indeed, we are poor Christians, or why do we regard Death as such an evil, and so much to be dreaded?"



"I suppose that is permitted to us to safeguard our lives. Perhaps, when our time comes, we shall not find it dreadful after all. But those poor fellows—one had a young wife and child, one a sweetheart."

"Ah!"

Phil's little monosyllable was eloquent.

"I have never felt before that it would be so bitter to leave the world. The world has such beautiful things."

His eyes were on Phil's face.

"It is a dear world," she said.

"Are you always sewing, Miss Featherstonehaugh?" he asked.

"When I am here and can talk to some one at the same time. A book abstracts me too much. I don't want to be rapt away from Castle O'Kelly."

She put down her sewing on her knees, and looked around her with an intense pleasure in the beauties she saw.

"I shall always think of you as I first saw you, stitching away for dear life, with the sun on your hair and your eyelashes. There is something so restful about that picture of you."

"That was because you were convalescent. Everything seems dreamy and restful then. Wait till you see my sister, Colombe. She comes on Monday. She always remakes everybody's bonnets and frocks right off. She will be sitting in the midst of chifions all day. You shall see how this veranda will be littered, and she will chatter, chatter, all the time."

He frowned for a minute.

"I'm sure it will be nice, but I half dread anything happening that will change the order of things. This is good enough for me."

"You will recant that heresy in a week's time," she said, laughing. "Colombe is tremendously popular. You will take an interest in her remaking of all Aunt Fin's and Aunt Peggy's fineries. When we take a walk together in Dublin, and meet an acquaintance, I always imagine that Colombe is longing to pull her hat to pieces, or to reset a bow."



"She must feel it an ill-dressed world."

"She would redress it and make it charming."

"Ah, her criticism is only destructive to be kind."

"Colombe is all kindness—at least"—she hesitated—"to people she is fond of. She likes a good many people, and loves a few. I remember once, when Colombe had been ill, and had given us all something of a fright, how glad we were when she sat up one day, and demanded the hats of the household to refurbish them. You don't know how joyfully the message passed from one to the other, 'Colombe is sitting up, trimming hats.'"

He laughed a little perfunctorily, as though he were not very much interested.

"I wanted to ask you something," he said. "That first day, when I woke out of my long sleep, you had a pucker between your eyebrows which I have never seen there since. What was it about?"

"It could not have been about you, for you were going on admirably."

"I didn't suppose it. Forgive me: I have only the right to ask of a man who owes you boundless gratitude. But it worries me that you should have any anxiety."

"Which of us can be exempt from it?" asked Phil, wisely. "It was not for myself; it was for some one else. For that reason I can't tell you."

"It was nothing about yourself: that is enough for me," he said.

"I have no personal anxieties," said Phil, frankly. "Things go well with me."

"Ah," he said, "you deserve all good things. If I had but the power you should never know what anxiety meant, nor any kind of sorrow or trouble."

"If you had the power I should ask you rather to use it on Colombe's behalf," Phil answered. "When you know Colombe **you** will feel that she is the one who ought not to suffer."



## CHAPTER VII.

## AN AMATEUR PROVIDENCE.

PHIL had walked over alone to lunch with Mr. Featherstonehaugh. At the last moment Miss Peggy, who was to have accompanied her, had been sent for to visit a sick girl who was a pet of hers and had suddenly grown worse. Phil noticed, half with amusement, half with sympathetic understanding, her Uncle Ralph's clouded face when he found she had come alone.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon when Phil returned, to find that every one was out except Miss Peggy, who had got home before her.

"We shall have our tea together on the veranda," said Miss Peggy, with an air as though she were prepared for a great enjoyment; "and then, when we are settled snugly, you shall tell me all about your visit. See what nice cakes Bessie has sent us up. Bessie knows how to please young appetites."

Bessie was the bright-eyed, brown-faced woman who was Bodkin's coadjutor in the care of the house. She enjoyed infinitesimal wages, and was always merry-looking, though she had a sharp and rallying tongue for that woman-hater Bodkin, whom she had despaired of after many years of laying siege to his heart.

Her range of cooking was simple enough, but it included many sweet things which pleased Miss Peggy's palate more even than Phil's. Miss Peggy now lifted the cover off some much-buttered and luscious tea-cakes, and surveyed them with rapt enjoyment.

"I wish I dare carry some of these to Larry and Micky and Katie and Biddy at the lodge," she said, wistfully, "but Bessie would never forgive me. It is not that she is unkind, you know, but she is so much attached to us that she couldn't bear any of her cooking to go elsewhere."

"Enjoy them yourself, Aunt Peggy, and leave off thinking of what you can give away and to whom you can give it, for once."

"Tell me now how Ralph Featherstonehaugh is looking," said Miss Peggy, as though she had not seen him for a twelvemonth.



"Precisely the same as he looked the night before last when he rode off at 10:30 P.M. He was horribly disappointed at seeing only me, and didn't trouble to conceal it."

A bright, soft blush rose on Miss Peggy's virgin cheeks.

"Oh, Phil, my dear, I am sure you are mistaken," she said, eagerly. "Your Uncle Ralph is so very fond of you girls. And I think, if anything, he is the fonder of you. Of course you are his own niece."

"I'm not offended with Uncle Ralph," Phil assured her, "and I'm awfully obliged to him. He is giving me one of Boxer's puppies."

"See that, now. He makes a very great favor of giving away Boxer's puppies. Which one did you choose, my dear?"

"It is hard to say, they are so much alike. It has the dearest little silver tuft on its forehead, coming down wedge-shape, and the blackest nose, and its chest is so wide that it waddles dreadfully. It is the very perfection of an Irish terrier puppy, and has the most impudent bark. I tied a knot of my lavender ribbon round its neck lest Uncle Ralph should by any chance make a mistake and give it away."

"Ralph Featherstonehaugh would never do that, my dear. He is so faithful to his promises."

"He might mistake one for the other. They did look alike, tumbling over each other. Only my eye, the eye of love, could pick out Paddy from the others. Uncle Ralph will keep him a week or two longer for me."

"And how did you think the Hall looking?"

She asked with a certain hesitation, and her eyes dropped before her niece's. They were eyes that fluttered like a moth in twilight when their owner was nervous—kind, short-sighted eyes, which had almost as little introspection as a child's eyes.

"A year older—a year dirtier," said Phil, briefly. Her heart smote her as she saw her aunt wince, but she had a purpose.

"You think it is as bad as that, Phil? You are used to Dublin smartness."



Phil brushed away the appeal in the meek face.

"Dublin dirt, you mean," she answered, shortly. "But even Dublin dirt is beaten by Featherstonehaugh Hall. I wonder how Uncle Ralph gets his health there. Of course he wouldn't, only he is out so much."

"I did not think it was so bad as that," faltered Miss Peggy, "though I was afraid—I was afraid Moll Malone was a slattern."

"You would only see the drawing-room and dining-room, and Moll would make an effort there, knowing you were coming. Besides, your eyes don't carry you far, though they are dear eyes, Aunt Peggy. I just noticed the little heaps of dirt swept up in the corners of the rooms, and at the back of the mantel-piece, and the beautiful old silver black on the sideboard; and the plates, even at lunch, they were only half-washed; so I thought I'd like to explore further. I got the chance when Uncle Ralph was called away after lunch to settle a dispute between two of the villagers. Moll Malone looked in at me through the drawing-room door. I was finding out how many notes were broken on the piano. 'Aye, that's right,' she said; 'amuse yourself wid the pianny. I don't like to see quality pokin' their noses where they're not wanted.'"

"That would be Fin," put in Miss Peggy. "She lectured Moll about her kitchen the last time we were there."

"I thought she'd some one in her mind, she spoke with such bitterness. I waited a little while. Then I went down stairs and peeped into the kitchen. No Moll was there. I expect she runs down to have a chat with the lodgewoman. But the kitchen!—Aunt Peggy, it was indescribable. Uncle Ralph's fine old dinner service was half of it on the kitchen floor, half piled on the table. The dogs had licked the dishes on the floor clean; they—the dogs—were lying before the dirtiest hearth I ever saw, too lazily comfortable to drive out the ducks and hens, who were quacking and squawking all over the place. I took up a plate from the table. Aunt Peggy, I believe the only washing Uncle Ralph's plates ever get is from the dogs' tongues."

"Mercy on me, child!"



"I could see the traces of their tongues on the plates. Then the saucepans. You should just see those saucepans! I didn't enjoy the remembrance of my lunch."

"She'll poison him!" cried Miss Peggy, staring wildly at her.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised. Aunt Peggy, were you ever in Uncle Ralph's bedroom?"

"Never," answered Miss Peggy, with a blush.

"Well, you ought to see that. There was a narrow path to the bedside between piles of ragged and coverless books and other rubbish. That bed, I dare swear, hasn't been made for a twelve-month at least. The counterpane was as dirty as the floor. I could see that it was lovely old patchwork under the grime. The windows were broken, and had been mended in some places with brown paper. Other panes gaped almost empty. I don't know how it will be when winter comes on. Uncle Ralph has not a very strong chest. I smelt mice all over the place. There are nests of them in those heaps of rubbish, I am sure. I saw a big meat-bone under the bed. Boxer had brought it there, no doubt, and no one had troubled to remove it. Uncle Ralph's clothes lay everywhere. The candlestick on the chair by the bed was nearly buried in grease."

"Phil!" gasped Miss Peggy, "don't say any more. I can't bear it."

Phil looked at her as though she had not heard her, yet her eyes were soft.

"The other rooms I looked into were worse. They were uninhabitable. All the beautiful old things gone to rack and ruin, buried in rubbish and dirt. Aunt Peggy, I had rather that Uncle Ralph had sold the things."

"Only a great emergency would excuse that," said Miss Peggy, lifting her pale face proudly.

"Am I cruel, Aunt Peg? Am I a wretch to you?" cried Phil, with almost fierce tenderness.

"I am grieved about poor Ralph. It is not your fault, child."

"But it is yours, Peggy O'Kelly. Oh, you hard-hearted





“ ‘Phil!’ gasped Miss Peggy, ‘don’t say any more. I can’t bear it.’ ” P. 68.







woman! Not content with depriving poor Uncle Ralph of his wife all these years, you are going to let him suffer unspeakable things at the hands of Moll Malone."

Miss Peggy put up her hands with a gesture of entreaty.

"Don't reproach me, Phil. It has been hard on me, too."

"Then why did you do it? You might as well have been married all those years that Uncle Ralph has been in love with you and you with him."

Miss Peggy's eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"Do you think it cost me nothing?" she said, with a passion that surprised her niece. "Do you think I rejected lightly the things that make the happiness of other women—that would have made my happiness? Do you think I don't look back out of my old age and see how beautiful it would have been—the home, the husband, the children—everything I rejected?"

The little, faded, modest spinster Phil had known was lost in this passionate and sorrowful outburst, before which Phil felt suddenly her own insolence and the rashness of her intrusion.

"Forgive me, Aunt Peggy," she said, humbly. "Of course I don't know everything. I was dull and presumptuous or I would have realized that there must be some reason I could not know. I am very sorry, Aunt Peggy."

Miss Peggy's face changed back to its old softness.

"Never mind, Phil, dear," she said. "I know you meant kindly. I am surprised at my own violence, so I am. Poor Ralph, I didn't realize how I was punishing him when I took the only course that seemed possible to me. I thought he acquiesced. He gave up asking me a long time ago. Now we are both old."

"He is in love with you still, Aunt Peggy."

"Poor Ralph, poor Ralph! I could have made him very happy once. But now we are too old. All that is over for us."

"He doesn't think you are too old. You are never too old if you are in love with each other."

Miss Peggy looked at her in wonder.

"Do you know that Ralph Featherstonehaugh was in love with



me before you were born, Phil? And I was not regarded as young then. People thought differently in those days. Sixteen was the proper age for a girl to marry at, and at twenty-eight all our chances were over. I was regarded as quite an old maid at—”

She paused suddenly and blushed. Even now Miss Peggy could not have borne to reveal her real age. Phil understood and sympathized. She filled up the gap in the conversation hurriedly.

“A lady I know was married the other day at thirty-five to a man some years younger than herself. He is romantically in love with her, and their marriage was something to make one believe in all the poems the poets have ever written. ‘I have felt the limitations of mortal happiness,’ she said to me, ‘in every other good thing that has come to me. But there was no limitation on my wedding-day. It was perfect happiness, the thing I have always believed was not vouchsafed to us on earth.’”

“Ah,” sighed Miss Peggy, “the women of to-day are more fortunate. When everything within and without the women of my day told them they were young and lovely, a foolish and cruel custom set them among the old.”

Phil was a little surprised. She had not given her Aunt Peggy credit for so much thought.

“Then your mother pushed me aside—not knowingly, of course. But her youth made me old—to every one but Ralph Featherstonehaugh. I believe what you say, Phil. I shall never be old to him.”

“Then why not marry him?” asked direct Phil.

Miss Peggy averted her gaze.

“I have never talked about this before to any one, Phil, and I never thought I should. But since you have asked me I will tell you, though it involves the telling of another person’s story. You know there is a considerable difference in years between your Aunt Fin and myself.”

“I have always supposed as much. Any one can see that, Aunt Peggy.”

“Well, Fin made a great sacrifice for me when she was a



young girl and I a small child. In fact, she refused an offer of marriage in order that she might fulfil her promise to our mother, and devote herself to my upbringing. She never talked about it, but I think it made a great difference to Fin. When the time came for me to give up something in return, I hope I did it cheerfully."

"Sacrifices are all very well in their way," said Phil, "and I dare say Aunt Fin's was all right. But I like to see some end in them. Why couldn't you have married Uncle Ralph? Why don't you marry him now, and give Aunt Fin a home as well?"

Miss Peggy shook her head.

"Fin would never consent to it—never, never! Ralph Featherstonehaugh is nearly as poor as we are. Nor would she accept the hundred pounds a year which I inherited from my godmother, and which has carried us over many tight places, Phil. Indeed, she couldn't live at Castle O'Kelly without the little income which has belonged to both for so long."

"I think Aunt Fin would do more than you imagine, if she knew that your happiness was involved, Aunt Peggy."

Miss Peggy looked at her in consternation.

"But she must never know, Phil; you understand that. Her whole desire all her life has been to make me happy. It would kill her if she thought she had stood in my way. And you see, Phil, it is all over long ago. We are old people now, Ralph Featherstonehaugh and I. Why, it is years since he gave up asking me. And we are both quite happy, old, and peaceful, Phil. Peace is as much as we can look for at our age."

Miss Peggy smiled in a poor pretense of accepting old age, but Phil knew better.

"You have plenty of youth unspent still," she muttered, "and I am quite, quite sure that Featherstonehaugh Hall ought to have its mistress."



## CHAPTER VIII.

## COLOMBE.

COLOMBE had come, darting into the quiet life at Castle O'Kelly like a bird of brilliant plumage, and making everything and every one perceptibly the brighter for her presence.

Even the invalid, who had disliked the idea of her coming, was content to watch her with lazy pleasure, and the quiet confidential hours with her more serious sister seemed to be forgotten and unregretted. Phil, Colombe, and the young man made the veranda their own. It was out-of-doors weather, and there could not have been a merrier party than the three who sat so much amid a pleasant litter of things feminine and masculine. The sound of their laughter exhilarated the quiet house. Their elders left them much to themselves, going about their occupations with a cheerful feeling, as though the years and the burdens had suddenly been rolled away from shoulders that had learned to stoop.

Colombe's was certainly an exhilarating personality; and Phil had never felt it hard that, generally speaking, her sister had been more desired than she. The difference between them was that Phil had leal friends, and people who were quite indifferent; or even disliked her. It was a penalty of her frank nature, which pretended nothing, that she did not possess the universal good will; whereas Colombe could hardly fail to be charming if she tried, and it was easier to be charming even toward the people to whom at heart she was profoundly indifferent.

Phil had cross-examined her over the quarrel with Piers Vanhomeigh, which was yet unhealed, to Phil's great disappointment.

Colombe had made a frank confession, with so much the air of a beloved child half ashamed of and half confirmed in its naughtiness, that Phil smiled with a humorous anticipation of Colombe's suddenly putting a finger in her mouth and refusing to answer any more.

It appeared that Colombe, moved by some unaccountable perversity, had bid Piers, when he urged his suit, to carry it to Rachel Pike, a gentle and modest Quaker girl, who was their



neighbor on the Mall, and their playmate, after her demure fashion, from childhood.

When Colombe owned to this, darting a shamefaced glance at Phil from her brilliant eyes, Phil suddenly became rigid.

"I couldn't have believed it of you, Colombe," she said, sternly. "You might have spared poor Rachel, seeing that you have always been preferred before her and always will be."

"I don't know about 'always will be,'" said Colombe, with a suggestion of pique. "He shows no sign of coming back."

"He does well to be angry."

"But, Phil, dear, it was only my stupidity. I never thought about Rachel's little fancy for him, only she was the first girl who occurred to me. I felt horribly ashamed when I had said it."

Phil's face cleared magically.

"Forgive me, Colombe," she said. "I might have known you wouldn't be mean to poor Rachel or any other girl. Why didn't you let Piers know that it was said without intention?"

"He was horrid to me," said Colombe, flushing. "You couldn't have believed it was Piers. His face got very red, and he just walked at me and seized my hands. 'You must apologize to me and to Miss Pike for what you have said,' he said to me. 'You have taken an unwarrantable liberty with a lady's name.' You can imagine how surprised and offended I was. Could you have believed it of Piers—Piers, who was always laughing and amiable?"

"And what did you say?" asked Phil, breathlessly.

"I said I wouldn't apologize."

Colombe's face reproduced the scene, an adorably mutinous face, like that of a rosy child, whose beauty wins its pardon.

"Then he laughed—a furious laugh, much angrier, Phil, than if he had scolded; and what do you suppose he said?"

The angry red burned in Colombe's cheek.

"That I had been vulgar. Phil, just think of it! I vulgar! After that you may suppose I was little likely to make any explanations. He stood there for a few seconds holding my hands,



and—and hurting them. Then he laughed again, and flung them away from him and walked out of the room. I have never seen him since.”

“O Colombe, and you let him suppose you said that about poor Rachel deliberately?”

“He thought more of Rachel than of me,” pleaded Colombe, half sulkily.

“No, he didn’t. He thought of you and was angry with you because he loved you. I think a thousand times more of Piers. I should like a man I cared for to feel that way about a girl who had honored him by—by liking him very much. If I marry I shall never be jealous of my husband’s old sweethearts. I shall like to think that though all his heart is mine he keeps them somewhere in his memory, as we keep the dead.”

Colombe stared.

“There should never be any one but me,” she said, vehemently. “Never, never! And as for Piers, I shall never forgive him. If it were any one else, any one older, graver—” Was there a little consciousness in Colombe’s face? “But Piers, a boy like Piers, three years younger than I am. It was intolerable.”

“Where do you suppose he has gone to?”

“I don’t know anything about him.”

“Nor care?”

“Nor care.”

“I should not be at all surprised if he were to fall in love with Rachel after all. I think that with the very nicest kind of men—and Piers is surely one—it must make an attraction when he knows a girl—a girl like Rachel—is a little fond of him.”

Colombe darted a look at her, as near resentment as she ever got with her beloved Phil.

“He should not have thought such a thing of me,” she said. “He should have known it was only a blunder.”

“I thought it, too,” Phil reminded her, feeling grievously in the wrong.

“Then you should not have thought it,” said Colombe, put-



ting forgiving arms round her neck. "But I forgive you. I shall never forgive Piers. And I am tired of Piers. I should hate to marry a man younger than myself."

Phil never doubted that Piers would come back, but a fortnight or three weeks passed and there was no word of him. It was inconceivable of him that he should resist Colombe so long. Perhaps he had indeed taken Colombe at her word, and carried his long-played-with suit to Rachel Pike.

If he had, how would Colombe take it? Colombe answered the question for herself by being the gayest of the gay. As Ross Lismore mended, they began to have little expeditions, small picnics, and river parties, which Colombe arranged and carried to a successful conclusion. Her delight in these small festivities was infectious. She vowed that if she could she would never eat a meal within doors. The cold salmon-trout and chicken, the leaves of lettuce and home-made bread, were, she declared, food for the gods eaten in a wood or on the river bank, with the voice of falling waters in one's ears. And the tea! Others might find the water tasting of wood smoke, or they might have brought salt instead of sugar. Such misadventures will occur in picnicking; but the tea was pure nectar, all the same, and Colombe was able to persuade the elders to enjoy it nearly as much as she did.

These functions were, of course, of the tiniest, for Castle O'Kelly had no neighbors within many miles. Sometimes there was only the little house party. Sometimes they were joined by Father Tom, or by the hard-worked doctor, or by Mr. Thornhill, who complained that he was being driven to authorship for want of something to do, and would jocularly implore the priest to lend him half his flock, so that he might see what it was like to have really a care of souls. His baker's dozen of parishioners were well satisfied with their spiritual condition, and inclined to condemn their easy-going pastor for a toleration which seemed to them to savor of Erastianism.

Both the doctor and the parson declared themselves victims to Colombe's charms, and were full of amiable jokes on the subject,



which pleased themselves so inordinately that they could not fail to please other people.

Colombe entered into the spirit of the thing with her usual animation, and received the two old bachelors' bouquets as she did their pretty speeches—with a winning gaiety and impartiality which made them more her slaves than ever.

Meanwhile the end of the visit drew near. Dr. Tuomy had at last given permission for his patient to return to his own home, and the Lismores were to travel with the two girls as far as Athlone.

This was the first arrangement, but presently, in the eclipse of gaiety which fell upon all when the approaching parting was touched upon, there came a ray of light.

"Come back with us to Knockarea," said Mrs. Lismore suddenly one day, while she talked with the two girls.

Phil's face lit up. The invitation was surely for her. One of them must go back, to be with the mother at the seaside, but she had given up the Italian journey to Colombe; Colombe would surely say that this was Phil's visit.

She looked toward Colombe with expectancy. To her amazement, she saw her own pleasure mirrored in Colombe's face. Colombe was going to speak, to accept for her—Phil—surely. No; Colombe was expressing her own delight in accepting the invitation.

Phil got up and went out of the room, with Colombe's delighted acceptance in her ears. She could not argue the point with Mrs. Lismore present. She must wait till she and Colombe were alone. But she was not going to relinquish this visit. For perhaps the first time since their childhood, she resented Colombe's eagerness to grasp at every pleasant thing that presented itself. Colombe had always stood in the sunshine. Phil remembered her father's speech. Perpetual sun was enervating. Colombe must keep her mother company at Dalkey.

She was quite, quite sure she was wanted at least as much as Colombe. Her own heart told her jealously that she was wanted



more. Colombe's coming had indeed hindered, to some extent, the development of the friendship which had been so far advanced when she had come. The intimacy of three is not—never can be—the intimacy of two. Easy *camaraderie* may develop, but there is no chance for confidences. Yet Phil had never wished Colombe away, any more than Colombe had seemed to wish her.

But surely, surely there had been something in Ross Lismore's eyes and voice for her which had not been there for Colombe. Surely in the gay and happy intercourse with Colombe there had been something lacking that belonged to the quieter friendship. Colombe had made her own of Ross Lismore, claiming him, as he grew stronger, for a thousand little offices; but that was Colombe's way, and if he had not seemed to object, why, where was the young man—or old, for the matter of that—who objected to being charming Colombe's squire? Phil was the last person in the world lightly to imagine herself neglected.

If she had any doubts Ross Lismore himself settled them for her. He made an opportunity to speak with Phil, even while Colombe's merry voice was calling him.

"My mother tells me that we may hope to carry you off to Knockarea," he said.

"It would be delightful," Phil answered.

"And you will come?"

"I shall come," said Phil, feeling that the matter was settled as between her and Colombe.

"I want you to know my home," he said, and something in his voice made Phil's steady pulses beat. "It is a dear old house, and the country is lovely—wooded country, such as we do not often get in Ireland, and the magnificent river. You will understand how I love it."

"Yes," said Phil.

"It has been ours for many generations. It will be ours, I hope, for many more. We have struck roots in it."

"I know. I feel the same about Castle O'Kelly. It has something stable about it, something one can set one's heart on, unlike



our city houses, which it is not worth while to love, because some one called them 'mine' yesterday, and some one else will to-morrow."

"I can always trust you to understand," he said, and there was a pause between them. Then came Colombe's bright, imperious call, and he turned to laugh at Phil.

"I shall be getting into horrible trouble if I don't go," he said. "I promise myself compensation for this at Knockarea."

After she had promised Phil was quite sure that she must be the one to go. Even if Colombe was very much bent upon it she would resist, for once, Colombe's coaxing and wheedling ways. Colombe might want it very much, but Phil's will was sure to win unless she chose to resign it. At the worst Colombe would pretend to sulk, and then go back brightly to Dublin to make new conquests, and doubtless to reclaim Piers Vanhomeigh. Colombe would be just as happy at Dalkey as at Knockarea; and Phil must only make up to her some other way for any disappointment Colombe felt about it.

## CHAPTER IX.

### COLOMBE HAS HER WAY.

PHIL had no opportunity of speaking to Colombe all that day, nor till another day had passed by. She listened with wonder to Colombe's delighted anticipations of her visit, which pleased Mrs. Lismore hugely, and brought the indulgent look in Ross Lismore's eyes, which was their usual expression when they rested on Colombe.

Phil wondered if her sister could have forgotten that both could not possibly go to Knockarea. If she had not, this arrogation of pleasure to herself, without a moment's consideration as to how Phil felt about it, hurt and somewhat angered the younger girl.

It was impossible to get hold of Colombe for a quiet moment during the day, and she shared a room with her Aunt Peggy, so



that Phil had to make her opportunity; and in this Colombe certainly did not help her.

"I want to talk to you, Colombe," she said, as they took their bedroom candlesticks the day after the invitation had been given.

"Very well, then," said Colombe—was there a flash of apprehension in her eyes?—"I shall come and brush my hair in your room."

Colombe, in a snowy thing all laces and softness, which it were a sin to call a dressing-gown, and with her dazzling hair about her shoulders, was lovelier than even by daylight.

She seated herself in front of the glass, to the exclusion of the rightful occupant of the room. Phil was too used to Colombe's doing this to notice it. In the room the two girls shared at the Mall Phil had grown so used to Colombe's monopoly of the glass that long ago she had given up the glass altogether, and would twist her brown coils contentedly without thinking of it, even if it did happen to be free.

Sitting now on the side of her bed she caught sight of Colombe's face in the glass, and imagined for a moment that she saw an expression there as though Colombe had come prepared for a bit of a tussle. But if it had been there it passed immediately, and Phil dismissed from her mind the idea that she had seen it. Whatever Colombe's faults were, she was usually frank enough about her thoughts and doings.

"Well?" said Colombe, as Phil did not speak immediately. She had drawn her hair about her face, and was brushing it steadily. Intentionally or not, it made a veil against any betrayal of expression, which otherwise Phil, sitting where she did, might have noticed.

"You seem to have forgotten, Colombe," said Phil, "that one of us must go back to be with mamma at Dalkey. We can not both go to Knockarea."

"I had not forgotten," Colombe replied, in a low voice.

"I gave up Italy to you," Phil reminded her, "and most willingly. I want to go to Knockarea."



"I want to go, too," said Colombe.

Phil stared at the golden fleece, which was all she could see of Colombe.

"Besides, they want me to go," Colombe went on.

A little red spot came in Phil's cheeks.

"I am sure they want us both, Colombe," she said, and her voice trembled a little. "They don't know that it must be only one of us."

Suddenly Colombe flung back her masses of hair and rushed upon Phil in an impetuous onslaught.

"Dearest Phil," she said, "let me go! It is nothing to you, and it is everything to me. You don't know how much depends on it, or you would not sit there hardening your face against me and your heart."

Phil had suddenly turned cold with a horrible apprehension.

"What do you mean, Colombe?" she asked.

"I sha'n't be able to tell you if you speak to me like that. You have always been so good to me, Phil."

Almost from force of habit, Phil put out her hand and stroked the golden veil of hair.

"That is right," said Colombe, with a sigh of relief. "Now you are my dear old Phil again. Phil, don't you see I must go? For the first time in my life, I really care for some one. All my future happiness depends on my going."

"You mean Mr. Lismore?" asked Phil, in a voice that sounded unnatural to her own ear.

Colombe blushed rosy through her hair, and her eyes drooped; but for once Phil was insensible to the appeal of her beauty.

"You have cared for people, or thought you cared for them before," she said.

"Youthful follies," said Colombe, contemptuously. "I am twenty-six now, and I know my own mind."

"But—about Mr. Lismore? Does he care?" asked Phil, in a low voice.

Colombe looked at her in a naïve surprise.





“ ‘If I should see Piers Vanhomeigh!’ echoed Phil, ‘I am to console him, I suppose ; to look after him in your absence. Is that it ?’ ” P. 88.







"Did you think he wouldn't?" she asked.

"Do you think he cares?"

"I am sure he does."

"I should have thought he didn't," said Phil, half-unbelievingly.

"Ah," said Colombe. "Of course you would not know."

It was true enough. Phil knew very little. There had been nothing between her and Ross Lismore—no love-passages; nothing but an affectionateness easily attributable to the kindness he owed her and hers. Perhaps Colombe was right after all, Phil thought drearily. Suddenly her resistance broke down. Let Colombe have this chance. If he cared for her, let him tell her.

"Listen, dearest Phil," cried Colombe again. "Be good to me in this, as you have been good to me all our lives together. You must help me—you must, Phil. I know I'm vain and selfish, not to be thought of in the same breath with you. But he loves me, I am sure he does. And he is good and wiser than I. I shall be a good woman if I marry Ross Lismore."

Phil said nothing. She was trying to think it out, but she felt dull and stupid. Colombe, impatient, gave her a little shake.

"What can it matter to you, Phil? It is only a visit, after all. I shall give up everything else to you if this goes all right. Why are you silent, Phil? Bid me go, and good luck go with me."

Phil suddenly set herself free from Colombe. Colombe must not know that it mattered to her. That would be the one unendurable thing. Her thought was to get rid of Colombe, and then to get rid of it all, and escape where she could be alone. The thought of explanations terrified her. She was no more the level-headed Phil. She could not imagine keeping her secret safe if she had to stay during the days that must elapse before the party broke up. And proud, sensitive Phil sickened at the thought that she had been allowing herself to drift into an attachment for a man who doubtless preferred her fascinating sister. There was something almost vulgar, it seemed to Phil's hurt soul, in two



sisters caring for the one man. At least, there would be no contest, she said to herself.

When Phil was alone, she prayed as one prays in such a trouble—voicelessly, wordlessly, almost without coherent thought, but on her knees, with her face hidden in her hands.

She suffered the more because it was her first suffering of the kind. She had wondered at the facile love affairs and the facile sufferings of other girls. It had always seemed to her that she could never give her heart except with difficulty, and where it was well sought. And here she was as foolish as any of them, and bitterly hurt.

She would not look forward to a more horrible time to come, when Lismore would be her sister's lover, husband. Ah! before that came she would have found strength to drag her feeling for him up by the roots. It was inconceivable that she could go on caring, suffering like this. No, she would be saved from that. The Ear to which she sent that voiceless, wordless prayer would be inclined to her. She would have help from the Source of all help.

Morning brought her the first word in answer. It was a letter from her mother asking that one of her girls should return sooner than the intended completion of the visit, as her health had been failing a little and her doctor had advised her hastening her visit to the seaside. The summer was a hot one, and the house on the Mall felt the neighborhood of the water in a dampness which made the heat more unbearable.

There was an expedition planned for that day. Phil had been wondering how she could go through with it, and the letter came to her like a deliverance.

She left the breakfast-table very early, and as she stood up, asked Colombe to follow her upstairs when she was ready.

When Colombe came racing into the room, Phil was already pulling her belongings about. She handed Colombe the letter.

"I'm not going with you to-day," she said. "I am going back to Dublin. It isn't fair to leave her alone a day longer."



Colombe read the letter.

"There doesn't seem any great need for haste," she said, dubiously.

"I think there is," said Phil.

"You won't be able to say good-by to Mr. Lismore. As there were already more of us than Tim Healy liked to carry, he walked over to take a seat in Dr. Tuomy's dog-cart."

"I am sorry," said Phil, untruthfully, "but it can't be helped. You must say good-by to him for me."

"Must you go to-day?"

"I ought to go."

"How will you get to the cross-roads, Phil? I suppose you'll get the mail-car there."

"It passes at eleven. I thought that Tim could take Mrs. Lismore and Aunt Peggy, and the luggage. It's not very much. You and I could walk that far."

"So we could."

"Colombe, I've been thinking that it is cruel of us all to leave Castle O'Kelly at once. They will miss us dreadfully. Couldn't Aunt Peggy go with you to Knockarea instead of me?"

"And Aunt Fin?"

"Could come and stay with us at Dalkey. They would both love their outings."

"So they would. We must talk to them about it. Dear Phil, we shall miss you horribly."

"It won't be for long," said Phil, in a voice she felt to be cold.

Colombe looked at her for an instant. Then she came toward her.

"I shall never forget your goodness to me, Phil, about this visit. You are a dear, good sister, and I shall feel I owe some of my happiness to you. You shall have all the nice things in future."

But Phil pushed her away gently. She couldn't endure Colombe's thanks.



"You are making a fuss about nothing," she said. "You know you always get the best of things. What is a mere country visit after all?"

"That is just what I felt," said Colombe. "Of course, it couldn't matter to you. That is one thing that makes it pleasanter for me, for I shouldn't really be happy if I felt I'd pushed you out of something you wanted. And you know you're very fond of Dalkey, aren't you, Phil? It will be lovely there. I should envy you, only—"

Phil, with a short laugh, suddenly stood up, and pushed Colombe toward the door.

"Go, Chatterbox," she said, "or we shall never catch the mail-car. Go and tell them I am leaving, and that Aunt Fin is to follow me next week. Be sure and enjoy yourself. Dalkey is always lovely, and you are quite right. I am very fond of it."

With a half-wistful glance backward, Colombe obeyed her sister, and went half-way across the room. Then she stopped.

"If you should see Piers Vanhomeigh—" she began.

"If I should see Piers Vanhomeigh!" echoed Phil, with a short laugh—she was folding a skirt neatly, and did not look toward Colombe—"I am to console him, I suppose; to look after him in your absence. Is that it?"

Colombe's glance at her was a wounded one. She hardly knew Phil in this unsympathetic mood.

"Well, never mind," she said, with a little sigh, going out, and closing the door after her.

## CHAPTER X.

### AUNT FIN EFFACES HERSELF.

PHIL was at Dalkey. Aunt Fin had come, and was her companion in those rambles over Killiney Hill, and through the vale of Shanganagh, which, before her coming, had been companionless. For Mrs. Featherstonehaugh, despite her doctor's orders, transacted nearly as much of her charitable business by post as



she had done in town on her untiring feet, and was incessantly at her desk.

"When I give up my work, Phil," she said, smiling a little wanly, "you may believe that I have not much longer to stay in the world. It is all I have to live for now."

Phil did not remind her that she had still two daughters. She would leave her mother in the cool room in Sorrento Terrace overlooking that divine stretch of sea and mountain, and wander away with her Irish terrier puppy at her heels. Pat was a dog of indomitable spirit, and from the first refused to be carried, be the way ever so weary and long. Perhaps, at the moment, there was no human companionship quite so desirable; but before her Aunt Fin had come Phil had thought out so much of the matter as required hard thinking, and had attained to a melancholy resignation.

She had reached the conclusion that Ross Lismore had never been on the road to become her lover. If he had, would he have accepted the breaking of her word in the matter of the visit without a reproach, or an effort after explanation?

Phil was inclined to think not. She had kept her eyes open through her twenty-odd years of life, and, despite her inexperience, she concluded that the misunderstandings of lovers, which make up the rusty machinery of many novels, have no existence in real life. A living man would scatter those cobwebs rudely to reach his beloved. A living woman would not be worth her salt, said Phil, if she were not ready to do the like. Would *she* let little piques and little resentments divide her from a friend, much less a lover? No; Ross Lismore made no sign; to judge by Colombe's letters, was, indeed, the most devoted of squires. Alas! she—Phil—who had been proud of her single heart, and her freedom from the little foolish love-worries of her peers—she had been the one to surrender her heart with an immodest readiness where it had not been required of her.

She walked down a good deal of the bitterness and mortification of it before Aunt Fin joined her, and was thankful for the quiet-



ness and freedom it was possible to attain so near her own doors. Dalkey was full of gay and happy people that hot August. It was easy to leave behind her the girls in summer frocks and the blazer-clad youths, and escape to the quietness of inland glens and heather-clad hills.

Aunt Fin found Phil looking less brown and wholesome than she had been at Castle O'Kelly, mentioned casually that Mr. Lisimore had been disappointed at Phil's abrupt flight, gave her the latest news from her Aunt Peggy's letters, more explicit in one way than Colombe's hastily scratched notes to Phil.

Miss Peggy, who was nothing if not tenderly romantic, scented a love-affair between her darling Colombe and the young man they had all come to be fond of. She was in a kind flutter about it, and apparently playing propriety in the most considerate manner possible.

"It will be your turn next, Phil," said Aunt Fin, noticing, perhaps, a silence that seemed unsympathetic. "Just think of it. Colombe is going on for twenty-seven, though no one ever would believe it. It is really time for the dear child to marry. When Peggy was her age, I had begun to give up trembling every time I saw a man approach her, lest he should carry her off. Things are different nowadays."

Phil and Aunt Fin were sitting on a seat kindly placed where Killiney Hill shadows the exquisite Vico Road. It was a moonlit night, and the crescent bay was silver as Dian's bow. There were little twinkling lights about the Sorrento headland, in the gardens, and in the windows of houses. A band was playing in the Sorrento gardens. The distance and the sea made the music dreamily sweet. Phil gazed that way. Every nook in the rocks, she knew, had its pair of lovers, real lovers, or young people playing at love. The thought of the young world pairing made Phil vaguely, dreamily unhappy. Somewhere there was another pair of lovers. Ah! that was something not to be thought upon.

She heard herself answering her aunt as though it were another person speaking.



"She ought to have married Piers Vanhomeigh," she said.

"Your Aunt Peggy, my dear. It was of your Aunt Peggy I was speaking," Miss Fin said, in bewilderment. She didn't know very much more of young Vanhomeigh than that he existed.

"No, Colombe. Aunt Peggy should have married Uncle Ralph. She ought to marry him now."

Miss Fin's face turned red in the darkness.

"They have been very happy without marriage," she said.

"No, they haven't, Aunt Fin," said Phil, doggedly.

"Peggy will be, will be— Why, bless my soul, Peggy must be well over fifty. No woman of fifty thinks of marriage, and no man for her."

"Ah, there you are wrong. Uncle Ralph would be out of his mind with joy if Aunt Peggy would take him, even now. He is dreadfully neglected for want of a wife, poor thing!"

Phil was looking away toward Sorrento, and thinking of the lovers there. Miss Fin's sudden alarmed color had ebbed away, leaving her paler than usual. Her eyes were startled. But even if Phil had been looking, of course the night hid her changes of expression.

"I used to wonder," she said, at last, "why they didn't marry. Why didn't they, Phil?"

"Because Aunt Peggy loved you too well to leave you, Aunt Fin."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Miss Fin, with sudden fury. "She'd never let me stand in her way like that. I, who would always have done anything to make her happy."

"I think she was wrong, Aunt Fin, but she did."

"And it is too late now," said Miss Fin, slowly. There was something piteous in her look at the smooth outline of Phil's young cheek.

"It is not too late," said Phil. "They are as fond of each other as ever."

"Peggy could not make such a change—at her age. If what you are telling me is true, Phil—and young people are sometimes



too sure—Peggy has learned to be happy without marriage. The past can never be undone.”

Miss Fin was pleading as for her life, but Phil was insensible to the prayer in her voice.

“They ought to marry now,” she said. “I told Peggy she was wrong. She said you were so proud. I said your love was stronger than your pride.”

“You talked with Peggy about it?”

Miss Fin’s voice no longer prayed that she might be spared. It was full of fear now.

“We talked about it when I was at Castle O’Kelly. Aunt Peggy isn’t happy in her sense of a divided duty. There is you on one side. She loves you so much, and she owes you, she says, a debt she can only repay this way.”

“Fudge!” interrupted Aunt Fin. “Peggy owe a debt to me, indeed! What would my life have been without her? I thought we should have been together for the rest of the time.”

The old, indomitable voice broke piteously.

“On the other hand,” went on Phil, “there is Uncle Ralph, wretchedly neglected in his old age, at the mercy of that horrible slattern, Moll Malone; his old house like a pig-sty; himself living in the midst of dirt and disorder indescribable. I think Aunt Peggy owes him this tardy reparation.”

“She would give it to him, Phil, only for me? You think so, Phil? You are sure of it?”

“She is under a delusion, Aunt Fin. She thinks you would not take a seat in the chimney-corner of Featherstonehaugh Hall. She will never go without you.”

“Perhaps I am too old to take a seat in other people’s chimney-corner, Phil.” The voice was heart-broken, and it pierced Phil’s young absorption in her own sorrow.

“Dear Aunt Fin,” she said, “have I hurt you? Perhaps I ought not to have spoken, though I felt I ought. Come to us, if you will not accept Aunt Peggy’s hospitality. You know that we should *love* to have you.”





“ ‘ It will be your turn next, Phil,’ said Aunt Fin, noticing, perhaps, a silence that seemed unsympathetic.” P. 90.







"Never mind, Phil," said Aunt Fin, standing up, with a forlorn air, "you did right to tell me. It isn't your telling me hurts. It is that I should have stood in Peggy's way. I dare say I can arrange to stand out of it at last, without troubling any one overmuch."

They went home in silence.

The next day Miss Fin announced her intention of going to Dublin.

"No, Phil," she said, "I sha'n't ask you to come with me, thank you all the same. I know Dublin has no attraction for you these hot days. Enjoy yourself your own way, my dear. In fact, I have business to do that I prefer to do alone."

Miss Fin looked older, grayer, sadder, that brilliant morning, and Phil's heart smote her. Well, some one had to be hurt, and Aunt Peggy and Uncle Ralph had done without each other long enough. Aunt Fin would get over the revelation, and bend her pride so far as to take a seat in Mrs. Ralph Featherstonehaugh's chimney-corner for the remaining years of her life.

The afternoon dragged itself away in long golden hours, and still Aunt Fin did not return. Dinner-time came and went, and no Aunt Fin. Phil was a little alarmed then, for Aunt Fin was punctiliously polite, but no doubt she had stayed with Mrs. Maxwell, or some other old friend, who had got over her scruples in the matter of allowing her hostesses to wait dinner. A telegram would not commend itself to Miss Fin's mind. She always declared that she could never bear to send one lest it should frighten the recipient out of his or her wits. She might have written early in the day, believing the letter would reach them before dinner.

With such thoughts Phil solaced her uneasiness till the dinner-hour had passed. Mrs. Featherstonehaugh was too busy about many things to be easily alarmed, and Phil would not have been, perhaps, if she had not been haunted by a memory of the old thin figure when Aunt Fin had stood upright after the talk last night, and the forlorn way she had folded herself in her lace shawl as though she would hide away her wounds.



Rat-tat! came the postman's knock. Phil jumped up with a sigh of relief. That was most likely a letter from Aunt Fin. She saw the angular writing, indeed, as the maid brought in the letter on a tray. How foolish she had been to feel disturbed about it!

But as she read the letter, her eyes opened in amazement and concern.

"My dearest Phil," it ran. "I am going away to a quite happy and safe place, so that no one need be uneasy about me. I prefer to keep my address a secret for the present. As soon as Peggy has become Mrs. Ralph Featherstonehaugh, I shall let her know where I am. I don't want to disturb any one, or make any one unhappy, if I can help it, any more than I have done in ignorance. I have written to Peggy, asking her to come to you at Sorrento. You will tell her all about it. I leave this to you, because I want no talk or commotion about my temporary disappearance. Let Colombe have her visit unspoiled. No one need know except those immediately concerned. You will send my trunk to the cloak-room at Westland Row, whence it will be fetched. Tell Peggy, with my dear love, that as soon as I see her marriage in *The Freeman's Journal* I shall write to her. My love and apologies to your dear mother.

"Your affectionate great-aunt,  
"FINOLA O'KELLY."

Here was something to put Phil's own troubles out of her mind.

Her mother was unsympathetic: thought it very foolish of Aunt Fin, and wondered if marriage at Aunt Peggy's age would be a becoming thing; hoped Peggy would not make a fuss about it, but if she must marry Ralph Featherstonehaugh, marry him as quickly and quietly as possible; and so on, and so on.

Phil spent a sleepless night, dreading the morrow that would bring Aunt Peggy to hear her explanations. What if, after all, she, too, refused to think of marriage at her age? Then she, Phil, would have caused all this trouble for nothing, and no one would thank her, and she would have dealt out useless suffering to those two she loved so dearly.



The morning brought her help. They were sitting over a late breakfast when, of all persons in the world, Father Tom Kirwan presented himself and his cheerful countenance.

"Here I am, a most unfashionable caller," he said, "but I've got a holiday, and I'm obliged to use every moment of my time. It's twice as hard work as my parish, Phil, but as it's the first holiday for five years I'm bound to make the most of it. Think what a traveled man I'll be when I get back. Why, Phil, child, what's the matter?"

Phil proceeded to lay the whole story before him.

"Do you know," he said, when she had finished, "I think Fin has done the right thing? Nothing else would ever have brought them up to the point. They should have been married years ago, but 'tis better late than never, and Fin has forced the pace for them at last. Poor Featherstonehaugh! he has a miserable home. Some of my brethren would have set matters right long ago, but I'm a backward fellow about stepping in where I'm not asked. And match-making is delicate ground, very delicate ground, though there are plenty of good priests not afraid of it."

"I'm frightened of Aunt Peggy," said Phil. "I'm afraid she'll be angry with me."

"Peggy's anger would be as alarming as a robin's. I couldn't imagine being afraid of Peggy myself. And you've plenty of courage, Phil."

"Not to face Aunt Peggy's anger," said Phil, slowly shaking her head. "I have no courage at all for that."

## CHAPTER XI.

"GREAT ADO THERE WAS, GOD WOT."

FATHER TOM suggested that Phil should take him for a walk and show him the beauties of the place during the hours before lunch-time. They could talk that way as well as another, and he guessed that it would be a kind thing to give Phil something to do while her mind was uneasy. Short of her own company



Phil preferred this old friend's to any one else's at the present moment. Indeed, it was better than being alone, for was he not going to help her with Aunt Peggy, and could she not trust his shrewdness and good-will to do the utmost possible for them in this new trouble?

Aunt Peggy could by no possibility arrive before evening, though most likely Miss Fin's mysterious summons would bring her at once.

Mrs. Featherstonehaugh had made a smiling apology for morning hours that must be devoted to business, and had withdrawn herself to her table in the seaward-looking window, upon which ranges of formidable documents stood tied and docketed, with a basketful of letters awaiting answers.

"Upon my word, ma'am," said the priest jocularly, "you do so many good works that I wonder, now, if you find time for your prayers at all, at all."

"With me," said Mrs. Featherstonehaugh, smiling complacently, "to labor is to pray."

As Phil and Father Tom went through the little town, he excused himself for an instant and disappeared into the post-office.

When he had rejoined Phil, and they had walked on toward the sea road, he mentioned that he had sent a telegram to Mr. Featherstonehaugh asking him to come.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Phil, looking her confidence in him.

"You wouldn't have poor Peggy proposing to him, the creature, after all the years he's been satisfied to propose to her? She'd never do it, Phil. I've asked him to join me at my hotel. He must settle it with her to-morrow. It's the direct way out of our difficulties. I know Fin, and if we did succeed in running her to earth, we'd never dislodge her till the time she has fixed for herself."

"How long shall we have to wait? Poor Aunt Fin! I shall hardly want to meddle with any one's love affairs again."

The priest looked at her with kind, keen eyes.



"You're not the same, Phil. What have you been doing to yourself?"

Phil flushed darkly, a flush of pain, so different from the flush of happiness.

"Never mind," said Father Tom, hastily—"unless it's something I can help in. Forget that I asked the question, Phil."

They were silent for a few minutes. By the time they spoke again they had come within sight of the shining stretch of sea and the lovely Silver Spears of Wicklow. Bray in its smoke looked as though wrapped in silver veils.

"There'll be no unraveling the mystery for three weeks. It'll take that to get them married," went on Father Tom, as though he took up an interrupted conversation. "I'll marry them myself. You'll have to distract Peggy for that space of time. She'll have to get some fal-lals, won't she?"

"I dare say Uncle Ralph will distract her," said Phil, faintly smiling. "But your holiday, Father Tom? You were going to London."

"Is it spending my money on the Saxons I'd be instead of staying at home to marry my chief parishioners? You wouldn't think it of me, Phil?"

"You'll only have a week or so left," sighed Phil.

"I'll put it in at Lisdoonvarna. I was there five years ago: it was a grand place. I'll do my travels this time five years again, please God."

Phil was very glad later of Father Tom's support, for what did Miss Peggy do when she arrived and was informed of the state of affairs but fly like a fury at poor Phil. It was half comical, and Phil had a hard struggle to keep from laughter, though her heart was heavy enough. The incongruity of it reminded her irresistibly of a tiny black kitten at Castle O'Kelly, the descendant of a famous line of mousers much in request. The kitten had been left longer than its fellows, and had gone wild before its new owner came to claim it. Such fury, such scratching, and spitting and swearing ensued before the kitten



could be caught that Phil, who looked on, had been reduced to a state of helpless laughter. At last, with precautions sufficient for the capture of a cobra, it had been somehow got into a very large sack, in which it still tore and scratched, a small bundle of claws and fury.

"Glory be to goodness, miss," said its new owner to Phil, "that it isn't the size of a lion or tiger it is!"

Phil was at once wounded and tickled by Aunt Peggy's rage at her unfortunate interposition. Afterward she went into shrieks of unhappy laughter as she thought over it alone. Aunt Peggy was, of course, very soon deeply repentant; and she had only shown her claws a little before Father Tom came to the rescue.

"Tut! tut! Peggy woman," he said. "Phil only saw what every one saw, that you ought to have married Featherstonehaugh long ago, and that it was better late than never. If I'd done my duty as your pastor I should have married the pair of you by force a score years ago."

After all, he had done the best thing to make Peggy happy till it was time for her sister to reveal herself.

Mr. Featherstonehaugh came in just before lunch the next day, looking as if twenty years had been rolled off his shoulders, and kissed his bride before them all.

"I've made all the arrangements, Peggy," he said. "It's to be on the fifteenth of September. Here's your engagement ring. I've had it for you all these years, and you may as well have it, though it seems hardly worth your while wearing it now. I've been to a tailor's, Peggy, for my wedding-suit. Think of that, Peggy—my wedding-suit at last! Upon my word, I'll never forget it to you, Phil."

Peggy cried a little softly into her handkerchief because she pictured Fin somewhere, hurt while she was happy; but it was wonderful how her old lover persuaded her to resignation and patience.

There was a little shopping to be done, a gray silk to be



bought for Aunt Peggy's wedding-dress out of Peggy's private purse, and made with a puritanical white muslin fichu which Phil felt sure would have pleased even Colombe. There were a few other things, of course, but Peggy seemed to have such a fine stock of dainty, if rather yellowed, underwear already, that shrewd Phil suspected a trousseau laid by secretly long ago.

Peggy openly derived a very sweet pleasure from her purchases. Most of the rest of the time was spent in sober happiness with her lover. They were out all day about the beautiful country; and it was a touching thing to see the quiet devotion of the two to each other, and how something of their prime came back to the two perfectly contented faces.

Peggy's manner to Phil was full of a tender contrition for that outburst of temper, probably the first of her gentle life; and her mind was only eased at last when Phil laughed at it, mocking her with the story of the black kitten.

Colombe knew nothing yet of all these doings. Miss Peggy was mysterious about Colombe, with a transparent mystery which Phil read like a printed page.

"Let the child be," she said; "let her be! If we snatched her away before her time it might be very unfair to Colombe; and her hosts would be so dreadfully disappointed."

From this Phil gathered that Colombe had not yet reached a crisis in her affairs, and that Aunt Peggy, for all her keen interest in such matters, was somewhat baffled and at fault. Colombe's letters grew less and less communicative. What matter? thought Phil. Any man whom Colombe wanted was hardly likely to resist her, and apparently she (Phil) had dropped out of the Lismores' world. There was never a suggestion that they remembered her. Phil could emulate that indifference, though she did not like to think that Mrs. Lismore, who had seemed to like her so much—that she too could be so engrossed in Colombe as never to remember Phil.

However, if she asked no questions of Aunt Peggy, her friend, Father Tom, was not so reticent.



"Is Colombe going to carry off Grace Lismore's boy?" he asked.

Miss Peggy confessed that it seemed not unlikely.

"I thought it might have been Phil," he said; "but of course I'm a dull fellow and a bad hand at the match-making, as no one knows better than yourself. Still, I thought it might have been Phil."

"There was a friendship between them," acknowledged Miss Peggy. "But Phil can be very friendly with gentlemen without any question of love-making. Phil's so sensible."

"I suppose I was mistaken. Is there any one else for Phil?"

"Colombe did say something one day about a young gentleman we met once or twice at the Mall, a Mr. Vanhomeigh. I used to think he was a spark of Colombe's, but it seems it was Phil, after all."

"Fallen out with him, I expect," thought the priest to himself. "Poor Phil! And she wouldn't quarrel lightly. There's nothing to be done. If she was a peasant-girl one might be giving her a helping hand."

Phil had seen nothing of Piers Vanhomeigh since her return. She had heard casually that he was away, and supposed that he had not returned. She was fond of Piers, and when she thought of him it was with a keen sympathy. She did not believe that he would forget Colombe easily or that he would turn for consolation to the other girl who had fancied him. She and Piers were in the same boat, she said to herself drearily—in the same boat.

She was prepared to be kind to Piers when he called at Sorrento Terrace one day and found her alone. He looked harassed and unlike his old, bright self, and leaner than of old.

"Where is Colombe?" he asked presently, looking down at his straw hat, which he was turning about restlessly.

"Did you expect to see her, Piers?" asked Phil, with an ache of sympathy. "She is out of town, at a place called Knockarea, near Adare. She is staying with some new friends of ours, the



Lismores. You must have heard of the wreck of Mr. Lismore's yacht when we were staying at Castle O'Kelly."

"Lismore, Lismore," repeated Piers. "I think I know the man. He was of my year in college. A very handsome man, dark, and dresses well without being a dandy. He was rather a brilliant fellow, I think."

"That would be the same."

"Ah, so Colombe is staying there! She has done very well without me."

His young face was grim, and a frown contracted his eyebrows over his usually merry eyes.

"It was a stupid quarrel," said Phil.

"You know about it?"

"You misunderstood Colombe, Piers. She spoke hastily, without thinking."

Piers' honest face turned scarlet.

"People make so free sometimes with a lady's name. It wasn't true, of course. Miss Pike is going to be married."

"Ah! I hadn't heard. I hope she is going to be very happy. I ought to have seen Rachel, but I've been very busy since I came back from Castle O'Kelly. Whom is she going to marry, Piers?"

"A man of her own religion, John Armytage, old enough to be her father, but a good fellow. The marriage makes her people happy."

"Ah, poor Rachel!"

"She won't be unhappy; she is too good," said the young fellow, wincing. "He is awfully fond of her, and she is too sweet not to care in return. But Colombe—what is Colombe doing not to have missed me?"

The *naïveté* of the question made Phil smile.

"I can hardly imagine that she would not miss you," she said kindly.

"She may think she does not for a little while," he went on doggedly. "I know Colombe. But she would very soon get



tired of being without me. Lismore would not make her happy."

"Why did you keep it up, Piers?—the quarrel, I mean."

"She has tried me a great deal. I thought I would stay away a little while. But I have missed her, and I was down after returning from Italy with a touch of malaria."

"I thought you did not look well. I hope it is quite done with."

"I am all right, thank you. I suppose I have missed Colombe's refusals."

They were interrupted then; and had no further chance of talking privately together. Again Phil had her misgivings as to whether she had been right in making Colombe's way easy. Piers had seemed confident about Colombe's feeling for himself, and Piers was no coxcomb. Phil was oddly impressed by his belief. Ah, well, if it was so, Colombe would no doubt discover her true feelings in time.

But a day later, the very eve of Aunt Peggy's marriage, Colombe and her affairs were put out of Phil's head by another happening.

## CHAPTER XII.

### AUNT FIN IS FOUND.

EVERYTHING was ready for the quiet little ceremony of the morning, after which the newly married couple were to go for a little honeymoon to Glendalagh, where they could be easily recalled as soon as Miss Fin had revealed her hiding-place.

A calm had settled down on the house. Phil peeped into her Aunt Peggy's room, and caught sight of its occupant on her knees, with an uplifted face and an expression of somewhat troubled thankfulness. She closed the door and went out. She knew what brought the shadow into the bride's joy. Ah, well, a day or two longer, and Aunt Fin would have revealed herself and all would be well.



The house was so still that the lapping of the water outside could be heard distinctly within. Mrs. Featherstonehaugh's canary was singing shrilly to break the sleepy spell; and Pat, the terrier puppy at Phil's heels, followed her with a frill of her skirt in his mouth. Looking from the staircase window, Phil caught a sight of her Uncle Ralph, smoking a contented pipe among the nursemaids and babies in Sorrento grounds, waiting for his affianced to join him.

He had his back to the house, so he did not see Father Tom Kirwan enter hastily.

Phil, coming down the stairs, was in time to hear the priest ask for her.

"Well?" she asked, leading the way into the dining-room. They had not expected Father Tom before evening.

"Fin is found, Phil," he said breathlessly, "and upon my word, that same finding puts us in a quandary."

"Where is she?"

"Peggy mustn't know—till she's married, at least. I hope we shall bring Fin to her senses. She's in a home for distressed ladies, victims of the land agitation. You know the kind of place."

"Ah!" cried Phil sharply. "It would break Aunt Peggy's heart. How could she do it? With so many houses open to her."

"I came to ask you if you'd go with me and try to persuade her to come back. I know Fin. She's a tough nut to crack."

"Hush," said Phil, with a finger to her lip. "I hear Aunt Peggy coming down-stairs."

The light feet passed the door. They heard the door open and shut, and watched Peggy cross the road to the grounds. She was dressed daintily in a gray cashmere with little touches of white about it, and a close-fitting bonnet.

"Upon my word, Peggy's become a young woman again," said the priest, putting Phil's thought into words.

"If she has to be told, Uncle Ralph must break it to her."



She'll take it better from him than any one else. When is there a train?"

He looked at his watch.

"In a quarter of an hour, Phil. Just time to put on your bonnet. You'll tell your mother?"

"She doesn't like to be disturbed at this hour. I shall leave word that I am gone out with you and may possibly be late for lunch. That will secure me a good many hours, for mamma will never think of me again till dinner-time."

"She's reared you well, Phil, and now she has no further anxiety about you."

"She has so many orphans and widows and criminals and penitents on her mind."

Phil left her message with the maid-servant and set out with Father Tom. On the way he told her how a lucky chance had put him in the way of discovering Fin's hiding-place. In the course of a leisurely chat with Mrs. Maxwell that lady had happened to mention a friend of hers, a woman of unbounded charity, whose good deeds she seemed to regard in a manner widely different from the somewhat cynical air she assumed toward Mrs. Featherstonehaugh's philanthropic labors.

"I remember Sarah Lloyd, the gayest of the gay," she had said, "and dignified as an empress for all her high spirits. I used often to admire her when she stood receiving her guests at one of her receptions. She dressed magnificently, and, faith, pearls and diamonds never found a whiter cushion than her neck. Then her husband and her only child were suddenly swept away from her by that awful thing, diphtheria. The thought of it makes me glad I'm a childless woman. The boy caught it first; and poor Malachi held him in his arms when he was dying."

"I remember," said Phil, interrupting. "There was no heir, and Mrs. Lloyd sold everything and gave it to the poor. Her name is blessed wherever she goes."

"Those very pearls and diamonds, Phil, she put into a fund



to help the distressed ladies. It was a delicate charity, and no one was better fit to handle it than Mrs. Sarah Lloyd. She helps them secretly, in their homes if they can keep them. If not, they come into the home she has provided for them. I'm a poor old rustic, and I was glad to hear of those good deeds, Phil. I'd never heard of this lady before, though no doubt she's well known in Dublin."

"I've seen her," said Phil. "An elderly woman with beautiful clear skin and gray eyes of youth, more shining eyes than fall to the lot of any girl except a fortunate one."

"Ah, then, I think I saw her pass out as I went into the Home."

"You've been there?"

"I've been there. I just found out that my guess was right, that Fin was within those four walls, then I came away."

"How did you suspect it?"

"Well, I was listening to Mrs. Maxwell's discourse upon many things, including this Mrs. Lloyd. Mrs. Maxwell's a great favorite of mine, you know, Phil, though I can't forgive Dominick for being an absentee from my parish. I believe Mount Maxwell is in my parish, although it is twenty miles from Castle O'Kelly. She was surprised at my not knowing about this Home. 'Finola O'Kelly,' she said, 'used to know Sarah Lloyd, and I've heard her say that if ever she wanted a shelter for her head she'd ask Sarah to take her in, because a place that Sarah ruled must have something of heaven about it.' I didn't say a word, for of course even Mrs. Maxwell needn't know of Fin's escapade till it's over; and I don't think I betrayed an undue impatience to be gone. But as soon as I could take my leave politely I was off to the Home, to find that I had got on the right track, after all."

"She doesn't know you've found her out?"

"She couldn't make a bolt for it if she did; but she doesn't. I interviewed a very sweet-looking young lady, who seems to be a sort of secretary and helper of Mrs. Lloyd's. She is apparently



used to dealing with delicate susceptibilities, for when I asked her not to let Miss O'Kelly know I had called until I came again she seemed quite to understand. 'Some of them don't like, at first,' she said, 'to let their friends know they are here, but presently they grow to love it. It is really a home, for we have practically neither rules nor restrictions. One doesn't need them with ladies. The only trouble is that we are very poor: but ladies bear that really better, strange as it may seem, than poor people.' "

Talking like this they arrived at Westward Row, and were soon in a cab driving to the steep Northward Street wherein Mrs. Lloyd's home was situated.

They were shown, by a pretty, fresh-looking maid, into a reception-room at one side of the hall. It was a narrow, high room, with a very ornate ceiling of fine stucco-work, and walls similarly decorated. The stained floor was highly beeswaxed; there was a beautiful old, high brass fender, and the chairs and tall settee were Louis Quinze covered in red brocade, much faded and worn in places.

Mrs. Lloyd came to them at once.

Phil, who was yet young enough to have a capacity for hero-worship, fell metaphorically at the lady's feet as she found herself greeted with an almost motherly kindness.

"I knew your father, my child," Mrs. Lloyd said, "and Marcella Maxwell has talked to me of you and your sister. We ought to have known each other earlier."

Heavenly contemplation sat indeed on the lady's broad brow and in the calm depths of her radiant eyes. Phil looked up at her wonderingly. Where were the traces of the human desolation that had swept over her long ago? Perhaps in the lines of the exquisite mouth, perhaps in the low voice full of sympathy, perhaps in the constancy and courage of her gaze.

"And what is this about Finola O'Kelly, Father Kirwan?" she asked, still holding Phil's hand. "Perhaps I ought not to ask till she tells me herself."



"She will tell you herself as soon as we see her, ma'am," replied Father Tom. "She's been running away from us, that's all, and making us all unhappy about her."

"That's not like Finola," said Mrs. Lloyd.

"Not so far as you see it, ma'am. It happened in this way. She had reason to believe that she had been standing in the way of her sister's marriage."

"Peggy? I remember Peggy O'Kelly—a very pretty creature."

"She's that still, ma'am, as you'd say if you saw her this morning. But, like many good women, she was astray in her notions about self-sacrifice. If you'll believe me, Mrs. Lloyd, there's no virtue so much abused, in real life as well as in the story-books. Well, after Peggy had sacrificed herself and a good man for years to save Fin's susceptibilities, what does her sister do but hide away from us and nearly frighten us into fits? Peggy wouldn't leave her and she wouldn't be a burden to Peggy, and between the two of them they've played the mischief with poor Featherstonehaugh's life altogether."

"Featherstonehaugh? This child's——"

"Granduncle, ma'am, though you'd never believe it, any more than you'd believe Peggy her great-aunt. Peggy'll be Mrs. Featherstonehaugh to-morrow, please God. It was Fin's idea to let her know where she was as soon as Peggy was safely married. But if we can't persuade her to come home it will be worse when Peggy knows where she is. They've never been separated, ma'am."

"I understand. Then we must try to persuade Finola, though she's very happy here. We are all friends and equals here, and a most happy household, I assure you."

"I can believe it," said Phil, with a fervor that made Mrs. Lloyd smile.

"Don't you think it dreadfully bare and poverty-stricken?" she asked.

"This is a beautiful room," said Phil. "An ordinary room would be vulgar by contrast."



Mrs. Lloyd looked around her.

"What we have is beautiful," she said. "You must see the drawing-room presently. Everything belongs to the ladies. Some people would think we ought to sell these and give the money to the poor; but I think they ought to keep their little refinements. Of course we don't appeal at all to outside charity. That is what makes us so poor. It would be so hard for them if we did. I only wished we owned our house, or that some one would give us a house in the country. We should love our rural seclusion, and our only condition otherwise would be that we should have a church close at hand. I am trying to obtain for them the privilege of having Mass in the house if we stay here; but perhaps God will send us a country house. We are all from the green fields, and these houses, despite their stately proportions, are sad, very sad."

Phil looked across at the great ghostly houses, full of memories, that shut out the sky on the other side of the street.

"It is like living among graves," she said.

"It is brighter upstairs. I will ask Finola to show you the house as soon as you have had your interview with her. Of course it is natural places like this should be sad to the young; but, my dear, it is a place of peace and rest to many who come to it."

"I was wrong to say that," said Phil. "I was only thinking of the street. No house could be sad over which you ruled."

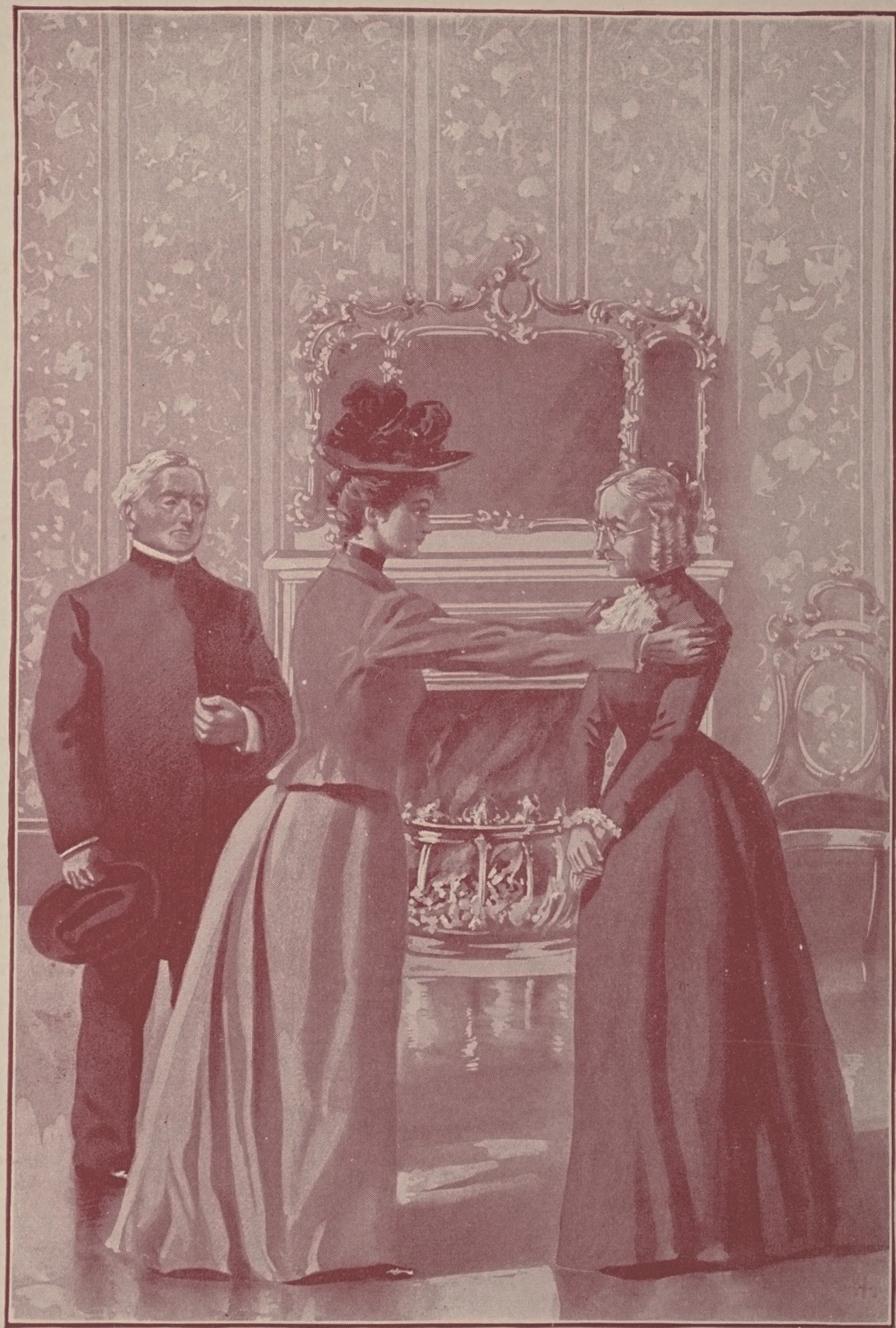
Father Tom had listened to all this in his shrewd, observant way. Now he broke in with a laugh.

"If Phil was in your house, ma'am, instead of her great-aunt, I'd never dislodge her. I'm very glad you haven't put your spell on Phil so far as that, for we can't spare her."

"Poor Phil! She has happier things in store for her," said Mrs. Lloyd, patting the girl's hand.

What a mother the little dead child had lost, thought Phil, and oh, if all mothers might be like that! How she had once worshiped her own pretty, gentle mother in the days before her





*“Phil took her by the shoulders and shook her.” P. 113.*







father had become all in all to her, and she had learned to be satisfied with the light caress or the indifferent kindness which Columba Featherstonehaugh had bestowed upon her girls! Like many another woman, Columba would perhaps have given a son that maternal passion which her daughters had never awakened.

"You must come and see me often, Phil," Mrs. Lloyd was saying, "if you can get over the dreary street and the melancholy journey through this sad old part of the city. Now I shall send your aunt to you."

A minute later Aunt Fin entered the room, wearing an expression of mingled obstinacy and shamefacedness.

Phil took her by the shoulders and shook her. She was taller than either of her aunts.

"How dare you, Aunt Fin," she said, "and you our guest, too! How dare you! Aunt Peggy is to be married to-morrow, and yet she grieves for you. Come away home with us. You shall dance at the wedding, for all your badness. Come home with us at once, and make Aunt Peggy's joy complete."

Fin's thin lips met in a straight line.

"You shouldn't have tracked me here, Phil, nor you, Father Tom. You ought to have known better. And I'm not coming home. I'm never coming home any more."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### FATHER TOM AND PHIL HAVE A PLAN.

PHIL put back the old figure at arm's length and stared at the pale, determined face.

"You hear her, Father Tom?" she said. "She says she will never come home any more. Do you think Aunt Fin has gone crazy?"

"Not a bit of it," said Miss O'Kelly. "Only I'm going to stay where I am. What should I do at Castle O'Kelly, a lonely old ghost of a woman with all my contemporaries departed? I'll



sell the few sticks there are left there—Peggy won't object to that—and I'll stay here and be a burden to nobody while my old bones cumber the earth."

"Do you think we're going to let you do that?"

"Nothing can prevent me, Phil, if I want to."

"Do you want to break Aunt Peggy's heart?"

There was a sharp ring of anxiety in Phil's voice. It was quite true that if Aunt Fin chose to stay where she was, nothing on earth could prevent her. And what would Aunt Peggy say? And it was entirely her fault for meddling. They were all going on happily enough before she (Phil) took it upon herself to play at Providence.

"It won't break Peggy's heart," replied Aunt Fin, without a touch of cynicism. "Peggy will have her husband. Once the husband steps in, Phil, my girl, the sister steps out, as perhaps you'll find one of these days."

"I don't know where you've been learning such horrid, perverted things," said Phil, big tears coming into her eyes, "but I think you're a wicked old woman, Aunt Fin, to run away from every one who loves you like this, and then to go opposing your selfish will to us all and saying you won't come back."

"Let me be, child," said Aunt Fin, with dignity. "What place is there for me in the world? I've found my place here."

"Among a lot of people you didn't know a month ago. Just listen to her, Father Tom."

"Among women chastened by much suffering, and with the sight of a real saint before my eyes every day I live."

Phil waved away this reference to Mrs. Lloyd. She was too near to sympathy with Aunt Fin on the point, and she was not going to encourage her.

"Why should you leave your home to live among destitute ladies? You are not destitute."

A sudden light came into Aunt Fin's plain face.

"I choose destitution," she said. "I've only begun to make my soul since I came here. I've been a worldly-minded old



woman all my days. I'm obliged to you, Phil, for leading me at last to the knowledge that the world is dust and ashes."

"Listen to her, Father Tom," said Phil, despairingly. "She'll be saying next that she's an example of a great conversion."

"You were always a good woman, Fin," said the priest half comically, "barring a bit of a temper, especially when you were beaten at cards. We've all got much to repent of, but I dare say you could make your soul just as well at Castle O'Kelly. My poor will miss you next winter if you go. It would be a bad thing for them and the like of them if all the good people were to shut themselves up in convents and such-like places and think only of making their own souls."

"It isn't a convent at all, then, Father Tom," said Miss Fin indignantly. "I'm too old to take to convent ways, and every one here is the same. But there's a church across the way, and you can say your prayers whenever you like; and, on the other hand, there's a good story-book to read, and some one to chat to, and you can go out and see a friend if you like—not that I should want to, lest people should say the O'Kellys were come down in the world—and we've a game of cards at night. There's a Mrs. Dingenan here plays as good a game of spoil five as ever I wish to see."

Father Tom burst out laughing.

"Upon my word you frighten me, Fin," he said, "but I see you're the old Fin after all. Let her alone, Phil! 'Tis pure selfishness and obstinacy on her part. She has found a place where she has everything she wants, and she forgets me and my parish. You'd think there was never a church or a priest outside of Dublin. Just think of the winters I'm going to have, Phil, with the one little social recreation of my life gone because your Aunt Fin has found a Mrs. Dingenan who plays a good game of spoil five."

But argue or laugh at her as they would, Miss O'Kelly was immovable.

"Tell Peggy to come to see me as soon as she can forgive me,"



she said. "I don't grudge her her happiness, and she needn't grudge me my contentment. Tell her and tell her mother and Colombe that there's nothing to be ashamed of in my being here. The sale of the furniture at Castle O'Kelly will keep me for the few years I have to live. And tell them there are better women than me here—not in regard of blood," she added hastily; "didn't Cormac MacArt, the High King of Ireland, marry an O'Kelly?—but in regard to other things."

"None of us will be a bit reconciled," said Phil, almost sullenly. She was beginning to feel the uselessness of striving with Aunt Fin.

"Don't be vexed with me, child."

Miss O'Kelly was changed now, for she saw that Phil had given up the fight.

"I shall always be vexed with you," said Phil, "especially as it is my fault."

"So far as your influence went you have dealt good things all round, child. Don't let your Aunt Peggy bother me, Phil—to come back, I mean. Tell her it's useless."

"I won't promise to do you any favors, Aunt Fin."

"Then do them without promising. Tell Peggy to come when she has made up her mind I am going to stay."

"If *you've* made up your mind, Fin," said the priest, "Peggy will know the uselessness of trying to alter it."

"Come and see where I live," said Miss O'Kelly, as though the discussion were at an end. "You'll be more reconciled then. It's a grand place for them that are done with the world, barring that I'd like a bit of green about the place."

"The sycamores of Castle O'Kelly will have the pale gold of corn now," said Phil.

Miss O'Kelly winced for the first time.

"Don't talk about Castle O'Kelly," she said. "I little thought I was bidding it good-by."

"What will you do with Bodkin and Mrs. MacNally and all of them?"



"Peggy will see to them. She'll want a new staff in that ruinous old Featherstonehaugh Hall."

"And what about Castle O'Kelly?"

"What good is it to any one?" Miss O'Kelly's face was crossed by a spasm of pain. "Ireland is full of old houses that once cradled a family and are tottering to pieces. Let it die. When I am gone there won't be an O'Kelly left."

"We'll find a better use for it, Fin," put in Father Tom.

"No police barracks or anything like that!" said the owner.

"We've no use for police, as you ought to know, Fin. I've a plan, though, and you'll fall in with it. Ask me no questions, Fin, woman. I'll tell you in time. Come, now, and show us your fine house."

They went up a wide stone staircase with a balustrading of beautiful iron-work. The walls on either hand were covered with the same flowery stucco-work as the room they had left. On the ceiling a hunting scene in the same medium hung in rounded stalactites. The hall was paved in diamonds of black and white marble. Everything was spotlessly clean, but bare as the stable of Bethlehem.

Double doors of deep wine-red mahogany gave entrance to the drawing-rooms. A cheerful fire burned in the brass grate of the smaller one, for the September day had a hint of autumn in it, and old blood runs slowly.

Perhaps a dozen old ladies were in the room. Some were doing exquisitely fine embroidery on linen; some were painting; one was copying music; two were playing at dominoes; one was reading a newspaper.

To this last, a spirited old lady with a face like Dresden china, Miss O'Kelly introduced her visitors. It was the Mrs. Dingenan of whom she had spoken. The old lady motioned them to chairs as beautiful as those Phil had admired down-stairs, and beautifully covered in bright old chintz.

"It is a pleasure to meet any friends of Miss O'Kelly," the old lady said, with a magnified condescension. "We have found



Miss O'Kelly a great addition to our circle. It is a pleasure to welcome the young among us."

Phil thought at first that the compliment was to herself. Then she saw that the old lady was not thinking of her, but of her Aunt Fin. Miss O'Kelly, indeed, with her erect, spare form and hair only lightly sprinkled with gray, looked what they call in Ireland "a slip" among the very old ladies who were in the room.

The recipient of the compliment seemed pleased. Thinking of her great-aunt's close on seventy years, Phil recalled the saying: "In the country of the blind the one-eyed man is king." Well, it must be nice, she acknowledged mentally, to find one's lost youth ready for praises among those dear, smiling old ladies.

The room had a scent of yesterday's roses. Then, too, the austere bits of furniture and china were exquisite of their kind, though the floor was bare, and the mere accessories of the room called loudly for renewing.

"I shall pray you to take me in here some day," said Phil, and was surprised at her own fervor in saying it.

"You, my dear!" said Mrs. Dingenan, as much surprised as though Phil were born yesterday. "The world will have many and many a change before you are eligible for a place like this. Certainly I sha'n't be here to welcome you, although I am quite young, I must confess, as compared to some. I might be a daughter of Mrs. Tollemache over there"—she lowered her voice as she indicated an old lady dozing over her knitting in one corner—"and she's not our oldest inhabitant, nor I think so old as she pretends to be. Ladies, you know, my child, will sometimes pretend to be older than they are."

"Some pretend to be younger," said Phil.

Mrs. Dingenan looked at her as though from an immeasurable distance.

"That seems rather foolish," she said severely. "I tell the truth about my age. I am eighty-four."



"I shouldn't have thought it," said Phil.

"It is true all the same," said Mrs. Dingenan, with such an offended air that Phil vaguely suspected she had seemed rude.

"I am very sorry——" she began hesitatingly.

"Never mind, child," said the old lady, her charming smile coming back. "You spoke thoughtlessly. If you look closely at me you'll see that I might be taken for more."

"It wouldn't be so nice without you," said Phil, abandoning the dangerous subject.

Mrs. Dingenan took up a little fan that lay in an old china bowl at her elbow and rapped Phil's shoulder with it, looking well pleased.

"You're a flatterer, child," she said. "But all the same I don't think you'll ever need such a friend as we've found in our day of trial. Utterly unforeseen trial, my dear, for those who loved us in our heyday thought they had done well by us. You'll never be loved better than some of us were, no matter how well you are loved. I only pray there may be no such deluge—no such deluge to sweep away the provision love makes for you."

Phil looked down at her clasped hands in her lap. She did not know how to answer.

"Now talk to Father Kirwan, Mrs. Dingenan," said Miss O'Kelly, with the briskness belonging to her reputed youth, "and introduce him to some of our friends. I'm going to take my niece upstairs."

She showed Phil the big bedroom which she shared with Mrs. Dingenan and two other old ladies. The little iron beds, modern and ugly, were screened off in their corners, and, peeping behind the scenes, Phil saw the photographs, the books, the bits of china and needlework with which ladyhood loves to surround itself.

"A little more space and the country; that is all we need, Phil, for our perfect contentment," said Miss O'Kelly, with a sigh.

"I felt as though I had been trying to draw Aunt Fin from



the Elysian fields back to earth," said Phil later, when she and Father Tom were once in the dreary streets.

"I think you left Fin pretty bare when you stripped her of Peggy," said the priest. "She is warming herself by a new hearth-fire."

"I don't think she'll ever leave it," said Phil, with a sigh.

"I don't think we ought to ask her, Phil."

"I suppose they squabble sometimes," said Phil wonderingly. "All women do. We can't have come upon an entire company of elect ladies."

"They're human, you may depend, or Fin would be out of it," said Father Tom, with a chuckle. "All the same I'd like to have them in my parish. They'd bring a blessing on it, even if there is covetousness and ill-feeling about the number of their years."

"Ah," cried Phil, with sudden enlightenment, "so that's what you are thinking of!"

"'Tis a queer thing it was left to me, and Fin, heart-broken at leaving Castle O'Kelly, to die a natural death."

"I see them," cried Phil in an ecstasy, "in those great rooms, and the garden and the orchard and the fowl and the lovely wild country! Bodkin will stay there and be a proud man. Why, Aunt Fin confided to me that that drawing-room held the best blood of Ireland."

"We shall see, we shall see. Fin has to be consulted and Peggy and Mrs. Lloyd."

"Every one will be delighted. And you will be their chaplain; and you must make the ball-room of Castle O'Kelly into a chapel. I shall come there when I am old."

The priest looked at her wistfully. He had a great affection for the girls he had known from babyhood.

"There are happier things in store for you, child," he said.

"*Could* anything be happier?" asked Phil, older than her years.

Her dream that night was of Castle O'Kelly, and of herself



kneeling on the threshold in a long black veil, while Mrs. Lloyd, with the face of an angel, came to lift her up and bid her enter.

All the same she cried poignantly in her dreams for some other fate she once had had a glimpse of, and when she awoke her cheeks were wet with her tears.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### COLOMBE'S WAY.

"COLOMBE will never forgive me," said Phil, after the bridal pair had departed, "for keeping her in ignorance of all these strange doings. I am going to write a long letter and tell her all about them."

"I'm very glad the wedding was so early," said Mrs. Featherstonehaugh, surveying the spoiled glories of the pretty breakfast-table which Phil had arranged with loving hands. "It gives one one's day practically undisturbed."

"I feel very unsettled," said Phil. "It is the usual effect of those ceremonies."

"You can afford to be," said her mother indulgently. "I am a little wheel in a great machine, and if I stop the whole thing stops."

"Well, I'd better be going, and I shall try to propitiate Colombe, who will always believe that Aunt Peggy went forth a guy on her wedding morning, because she was not here to superintend the bride's toilet."

The bridegroom had departed for his honeymoon, charged to break the news of Fin's place of refuge to his bride, and happily confident of being able to reconcile her to everything. If Fin was to be their neighbor at Castle O'Kelly all would be delightful, and Peggy's tender heart would not need to reproach itself with leaving her sister lonely forever. Father Tom had volunteered to conduct the negotiations with Miss Lloyd. There was little doubt about Fin's giving her consent. So things seemed to be coming right in that direction after all.



And now Colombe had to be told of all these events and projects.

Her visit had lengthened itself out beyond what was intended, a sure sign that things were going well, Phil thought, in a heart that knew its own bitterness.

Now that the distraction of Aunt Peggy's and Aunt Fin's affairs, which had been helping Phil of late, was removed, her own troubles returned. The sight of a letter from Colombe on the table turned her cold with apprehension once more. She never knew the day when she might be called upon to hear Colombe's great news, to sing her epithalamium with her. Alas! alas! Phil was no more reconciled now than she had been two months ago. With a sickness of disgust at her own folly and weakness, she recognized that she was no more ready to accept Colombe's probable husband in sisterly fashion than she had been at the beginning. She was still the unready, all her defenses down, her weak places unguarded, when any day she might be called upon to do battle.

She had felt vaguely the coldness of her letters to Colombe, which perhaps was rather between the lines than to be read by the careless reader. And Colombe was ever careless.

Now, in a passionate fit of repentance, she wrote fondly, comforting her own sore heart by taking it to the sister who was ignorantly robbing her of joy.

It was a long and ample letter. The lunch-bell rang before Phil had signed it.

Just at the last her pen hovered in the air uncertainly. "Shall I, shall I not?" she asked herself. Then she decided in the affirmative. Piers, whom she was fond of, should have his chance, and her conscience need not torture her for it hereafter.

"I suppose you never saw Piers Vanhomeigh, after all," she wrote, "so you don't know that he was very ill with malaria after he left you in Italy. He was here one day a month ago asking for news of you. Afterward he wrote to me that he should be in your neighborhood and would try to see you. But I suppose he



did not go, for yesterday I met Rachel Pike, who is soon to become Rachel Armytage. She wanted to know when we were all coming back to the Mall, and if you would be home in time for her wedding. She mentioned that Piers had had influenza. There is an epidemic of it in Dublin now. He had been very ill, but Rachel had heard that he was better. It was hard luck getting it on top of the malaria."

Phil dispatched her letter. It could not affect things very much one way or another now. She did not suppose for an instant that it would make Colombe break through the cordon of difficulties which was raised, she reported, whenever she talked of coming home. Phil could well believe that Colombe made a difference in that quiet house, so that neither mother nor son would hear of her returning till she must. She (Phil) could never have made such a difference, or else would she be so soon forgotten?

However, forty-eight hours had not passed before Colombe arrived from the station in a cab laden high with parcels and boxes of all kinds.

Phil, who was making a sober toilet for dinner, saw Colombe's arrival from her window, and ran down-stairs to welcome her. No matter what tidings she brought, Colombe was Colombe still, delightful and delighting always. Why, the very sight of her, in the airy muslin which she had chosen to travel in, seemed to light up the gray twilight. Phil had been finding those summer evenings by the sea an oppression of late.

Colombe returned Phil's embrace a trifle perfunctorily, asked after her mother, and permitted herself to be led up-stairs to Phil's room, where her trunks followed her, and Phil stood, eager to be lady's maid, as she had so often been to Colombe and Colombe to her.

But instead of making an attempt to remove her hat Colombe, as soon as the maid had left the room, came and stood over Phil. Then Phil remembered seeing her sister's portentous face. Here at last was the news she had been dreading to hear. With Colombe's eyes on her would she be able to hide what she felt? Uncon-



sciously Phil shivered, and her heart began to beat hard in her ears. She felt stifling, as though she were drowning and could not breathe.

"I wouldn't have done it to you," Colombe was saying in pale reproach.

What on earth did Colombe mean? What was she reproaching her about?

"He may be ill and dying this minute," said Colombe again. You know what a fatal epidemic of influenza it is. How those wretches of newspapers stabbed my heart in the train with their record of deaths! And to think that I should not have known, that my heart should not have told me! Why did you keep it from me, Phil?"

"I thought you were enjoying yourself," stammered Phil.

"Enjoying myself! As though anything mattered if things were not well with Piers. You know I quarreled with him, Phil, but I cared for him all the time, though I tried to forget him. Now if I lose him, after all!"

Colombe's face was really white and scared. She gripped Phil's shoulder so hard that it hurt, but it passed unnoticed in the general topsy-turviness of things which made Phil almost giddy.

"There is no question of losing him," she said. "He is young and strong, though the malaria had pulled him down."

"He got it after I had sent him away in anger," groaned Colombe. "Tell me, now, what Rachel said. That he was better—you are sure she said that? To think that Rachel Pike should have known all about and I have known nothing!"

"There is the dressing-bell," said Phil. "Take off your hat, Colombe, and bathe your eyes. Don't be making yourself miserable. There is nothing alarming in Piers' condition."

"I've made up my mind to one thing," said Colombe, allowing Phil to take off her hat for her. "I'll accept Piers at once. I was terrified when I thought of all the years I'd been playing fast and loose with my happiness. I was so foolish that I almost de-



served to lose it. Why did you let me go away, Phil, for all those interminable weeks estranged from him? You were always the wise one. Why didn't you advise me better?"

What midsummer madness was this? Must Colombe be reminded in so many words? For one giddy moment Phil almost felt that she deserved the reproaches in Colombe's beautiful eyes.

"How was I to know?" she asked uncertainly. "You thought—you have forgotten, Colombe, that you cared for some one else."

"Oh! You are thinking of that!" said Colombe contemptuously. "I was distracting myself because Piers and I were estranged. There was never really anything in it. You should have gone in my place, Phil, and have sent me back to Piers."

Phil walked away from her sister and busied herself in disposing of some of the many parcels. When she answered her it was in a low voice. She was shaken with anger, but Colombe must never know. She did not speak till she could control herself.

"You would not let me go," she said. "Your memory is short, Colombe. You have forgotten the scene you made in my bedroom at Castle O'Kelly, the things you said——"

"Hush! hush!" said Colombe. "I don't want to remember. I am horribly ashamed. Now that Piers is ill I know my own heart. He is everything to me. Let me forget my folly, Phil."

Phil, turning her averted gaze, saw Colombe pressing her hands to her cheeks, with a look in the glass at the charming picture she presented. Shamefacedness became Colombe, as did, indeed, most other things.

"Be sure you know your own heart this time," said Phil, and her voice was dry.

It came on Colombe like a dash of cold water.

"You speak as if you didn't believe me, Phil," she said in a hurt voice. "You must know I have only cared for Piers always."

"Piers thought so."

"He thought so? He told you so? Tell me what he said, Phil. When did he say it? The day he came to see you? Tell me every word he said."



"What matter? He can tell it to you himself. I can't remember all he said to me."

"I think you're unsympathetic, Phil. If you cared for any one I should have been sympathetic with you."

Phil went on shaking out a gown, just as she had done that morning at Castle O'Kelly when she had refused Colombe's thanks for yielding up her happiness. But had she done it, after all? Phil thought she knew more of men than that. If he had cared he would have followed her.

"Dear Phil," said Colombe softly, coming behind her and kissing one of the little bronze curls which lay so prettily on Phil's white neck, "you despise me—I can see that. I have always been a disappointment to you. But Piers is going to make me different. Piers has always believed in me. Perhaps that is why I care for him so much."

Her voice broke in a hurt sob like a child's.

"Never mind, Colombe," said Phil, turning to her. "You are very sweet as you are. Perhaps Piers could hardly improve upon you."

"And you will come with me to-morrow to see how he is?" said Colombe, smiling once more in her sister's recovered tenderness. "Do you remember the time we went to his house to tea, how pretty the room was? He would ruin himself in roses for me. To think of him, poor fellow, left to his old housekeeper when he was ill. I can hardly bear to think of it."

"People will talk, Colombe, if they know you went to see him."

"They won't have time," said Colombe, laughing, "because we shall be married so soon. Piers has no one but himself to consult. We will do our furnishing together. I'll tell you what, Phil—we'll take Aunt Fin with us. That will satisfy Dublin with its silly little notions of propriety."

"Very well," said Phil. "Now tell me how you left our friends. It has been a happy summer on the whole?"

Something wistful in Phil's face and voice reached Colombe even through her absorption in her own affairs.



"You ought to have had it, by right, Phil. Mrs. Lismore always wanted you. She is so comfortable to stay with, so soft and motherly. It's lovely to see a really loving mother. Ah, well, I was a selfish wretch. I wish you would go now. They want you, if it is not too late."

"Next summer," said Phil, shaking her head.

She did accompany Colombe on her visit to Piers next day, calling for Miss O'Kelly and whisking her off in a cab so that people might not say Colombe was forward if they came to know she had sought out Piers.

Colombe wore her most subdued air that morning, though under it Phil thought she discovered a sparkle of exhilaration.

Of course Colombe had moved Miss Fin to do what she wished. Equally of course she prevailed on Miss Brock, Piers' housekeeper, not to tell him who his visitors were.

"Indeed, then," said the good woman, "you're welcome as flowers in May, ladies, for there he lies on his sofy, fretting himself to a bag o' bones because he wants to be out and the doctor says he mustn't. Yez'll cheer him up finely wid a sight o' your faces."

Colombe went in first to the dusty room where Piers was lying in fretful contemplation of the pipes and books, with which apparently Miss Brock had tried to solace him. Her face was like a rose. The dullest man would have seen the love in it, and Piers was not dull.

He sprang up with an exclamation. Then he took Colombe's two hands and drew her toward him.

"In another half hour," he said, "I should have been on my way to you if all the doctors on earth had tried to prevent me."

He held out a hand then to Phil and to Miss O'Kelly.

"You are very good to come," he said, "and to bring me Colombe."

"Colombe brought us," said Phil.

Colombe was sitting down now, ruefully contemplating Piers' wan cheeks and general leanness.



"Do you think," said Phil, "that the doctor would let us carry you off to Dalkey if we were to drive the whole way?" ,

"He only barred my rushing off to County Limerick. But even that he was willing I should do in a day or two."

"You dear, kind Phil!" breathed Colombe rapturously.

"You can ask him now," said the patient; "that is his knock."

A moment later the doctor was ushered into the room. He accepted Phil's suggestion with bland approval.

"He will be all right now," he said. "I was only afraid of those little country places, damp beds, and all that sort of thing for him."

So Piers was carried off to Dalkey, where Mrs. Featherstonehaugh, having so many things to think about, was less disturbed than most mothers would have been by having a future son-in-law so suddenly thrust upon her.

## CHAPTER XV.

### COLOMBE MAKES A CONFESSION.

LIFE had seemed ever to strew roses, roses all the way for Colombe; and Phil marveled now at how smoothly everything went for this favorite of fortune. Every one smiled on her love-affair; good wishes and beautiful gifts were shed upon her in profusion every day the sun rose. Another girl might easily have let slip her happiness in all the years that Colombe had played with love. With Colombe, as soon as it was her royal will to take love seriously he stood waiting for her, clad in cloth of gold and with exquisite promises for all the years to come.

It was such a marriage as delights the benevolent world, and if there was the snake of envy it hid under the flowers in Colombe's Garden of Eden.

Piers was handsome, healthy, clever, good, and well endowed with money. What could be more desirable? Even Mrs. Featherstonehaugh had little stirrings of pride at the congratulations that were showered upon her, though she and Colombe were as far



estranged as it was possible for two people to be who would never dream of quarreling.

Piers was a barrister by profession, but had hitherto done little, though people said he might go far if he would. Now he declared his intention to work, so that Colombe might be proud of him—to make up for all the years that Colombe had kept him idle and without an incentive.

Happiness makes many people selfish. With Colombe it seemed different. She thought of every one in those days when she walked about in a quiet rapture with the eyes of a bride under her golden lashes. She wanted to make every one share her happiness. Was it likely that Phil could keep in her heart even a shadow of resentment against the sister whose charm she felt as a lover might?

Perhaps the last trace of it vanished before an exquisite kindness which Colombe chose for her wedding-gift from her groom rather than pearls or rubies or diamonds. This was the putting of Castle O'Kelly in a certain necessary order for its new inmates.

Mrs. Lloyd had accepted with delight the offer of Castle O'Kelly as a home for her ladies. The old ladies themselves were enchanted. Miss O'Kelly walked the earth with a new air. Yes, was she not to be a sort of head of the house, being so much the youngest of the band and a shrewd, managing woman by nature?

Still the house was somewhat ruinous. A deal had to be done to make it habitable for twenty or thirty new inmates. And where was the money to come from? No one knew till Piers Vanhomeigh made the check, which was to have bought his wife a diamond tiara, payable to Miss Finola O'Kelly, with the understanding that it should be expended by her on putting Castle O'Kelly in thorough repair.

After this Colombe was more widely loved and praised than ever. Mrs. Lloyd came to see her, and took her in her arms with a giving thanks that was like a saint's benediction. Father Tom Kirwan, who was unemotional, spoke of Colombe as one of the



angels of earth. The glorification of the bride-elect in these days would have made many a sister feel dowdy and overlooked. Not so Phil. She remembered her talks with her father in his last illness, and longed that he might have known how sweetly and graciously the child who had comforted him would develop into womanhood.

The topic of the Lismores Phil had put away from her as a dangerous one. She knew that Colombe had heard from Mrs. Lismore at least once, and she supposed had written in reply, but if there had been a message for her Colombe had not mentioned it.

Miss Peggy—Mrs. Ralph Featherstonehaugh, rather—had inaugurated this epidemic of wedding-clothes and wedding-doings which seemed to have become an institution in the hitherto uneventful household.

It was thought well that they should return to the Mall to make the preparations for Colombe's wedding, and their stay at the seaside was shortened a little so that Colombe's shopping could be performed more conveniently. Colombe was going to marry a rich man and was to have many garments. And only half willingly she was obliged to leave them to other hands, since her lover claimed so much of her, and the time for preparation was short.

The grim old house by the sluggish canal grew unrecognizably busy in those days.

Milliners' boxes and all sorts of parcels were constantly arriving. Patterns overflowed from Colombe's own room all over the house, invading even her mother's tidy writing-table. When they looked up gayly out of her folded and docketed reports, Mrs. Featherstonehaugh put them away with a smile. She was pleased with Colombe since that benefaction to Castle O'Kelly. It showed something of herself in the child which hitherto she had not suspected.

It was golden October weather, such autumn weather as one often gets in Ireland, warm as summer, but with something pathetic in its beauty. The trees by the canal-side had carpeted all the way with a drift of warm pale-gold leaves.



"I hope it will be like this in Paris," said Colombe, looking out from the window of Phil's room at the dying reflection of a tender sunset on the green water. Colombe was to spend her honeymoon in Paris, and the time before her wedding-day was dwindling now.

"You are sure to have queen's weather, you fortunate girl!" replied Phil. "Everything goes well with you."

"When we come back," said Colombe, "we shall have some gay times. You are so pretty, Phil. You ought to be seen and admired. Mamma has not done her duty by you. I'll tell you what I should have liked, Phil, that we should have been married the same day."

"You must find me the swain first," said Phil, with a smile which was rather forced.

"There are plenty of swains, only you haven't seen them to pick out the true one. I think you're cold-hearted, Phil."

Phil shook her head.

"You have taken all the lovers, Colombe," she said, with an attempt at gayety.

"It was only that I willed to attract them and you didn't."

"By the way," said Phil, finding something to be busy about, "have you heard from Mrs. Lismore again? And how are they?"

Colombe turned red.

"Do you know, Phil," she said, "I'm such a wretch. I haven't written. I've been so busy."

"Yes, of course, you've been very busy."

Colombe's embarrassment told Phil the truth. In these days the thought of her passing fancy for Ross Lismore was something not to be borne. When women have found the true love they are bitterly ashamed of having gone after false fires.

"Still, they were very good to you, Colombe," she went on. "You ought to write."

"I shall, dear Phil. I shall write to-morrow."

It was the last day of the perfectly happy feeling between the sisters.



The next day brought Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Featherstonehaugh to stay for the wedding. Aunt Fin had refused to come till the night before. She was deep in plans and estimates every day with Mrs. Lloyd. The move to Castle O'Kelly could hardly be made before the spring. But Fin solaced her impatience with the thought that they should take possession of Castle O'Kelly at its loveliest—Castle O'Kelly with a stout roof against next winter and a general renovation out of the cost of Colombe's tiara.

Peggy Featherstonehaugh, the bride of a month, had already prettily assumed the placid air of a matron of many years' standing. Quite unconsciously she betrayed a feeling which she would rather have died than owned to, and that was a profound, if gentle, contempt for the unmarried state.

"What a blessing she has you to go on with, Colombe!" said Phil, before Aunt Peggy was half an hour in the house.

Presently Aunt Peggy joined the two girls in that little sitting-room of theirs which had always been Colombe's altar of vanities, and which now fairly overflowed with signs and tokens of what was coming.

She was immensely excited over Colombe and insatiable for details about everything.

"She is younger than any of us," thought Phil, looking at her aunt's delicate, faded prettiness, which was most becomingly clad.

Then Aunt Peggy made a speech which was like a bomb-shell into the peace of the sisters.

"I was so surprised, Colombe," she said, "when I heard it, for you certainly did tell us at Knockarea that it was Phil. That was very naughty of you."

Colombe turned red and pale.

"What did I say?" she stammered. "I have forgotten."

"I can't tell you exactly what you did say, but you gave us the impression that Mr. Vanhomeigh was Phil's lover. Mrs. Lisimore said to me afterward that of course it explained why Phil would not come to them. I felt at the moment that I was saying something stupid under the circumstances, as an unmarried





*“The hand which held the scissors shook so much that Colombe had to desist.  
After a few seconds Phil went out of the room.” P. 135.*







woman might, in talking to you of a young gentleman I supposed to be an aspirant to your hand. But of course I was mistaken in thinking it was young Lismore, after all."

"Yes, you were quite mistaken, of course," said Colombe. "I oughtn't to have said it. I suppose it was an awkward moment!"

The hand which held the scissors—Colombe was cutting at something or other—shook so much that Colombe had to desist. She gave a look of entreaty at Phil. Phil was not looking at her. After a few seconds of silence Phil went out of the room.

A little while afterward Colombe knocked at Phil's door. There was no answer and Colombe went in. Phil was standing by the dressing-table gazing rigidly before her. She turned a face like stone to Colombe's contrite gaze.

"What is the matter, Phil?" said Colombe, with a cry of alarm. "I know it wasn't straight of me. It was horribly mean and lying, but I didn't think it could matter. Ross Lismore was looking at me, and I fancied I cared for him and said the first thing that came into my head."

Phil said nothing. She had looked away from Colombe again and was drumming mechanically with her fingers upon the toilet-glass. Something in the rigidity of her look frightened Colombe.

"Phil, Phil!" she cried, "speak to me! You didn't care so much as all that?"

"Let me alone," said Phil. "You have everything you want."

Colombe's eyes filled with tears. She made a snatch at Phil's hand, but Phil withdrew it from her.

"You never made anything hard for me before, Phil," she said.

"We all made everything too easy for you," said Phil bitterly, "and this is the result."

Colombe's pretty color turned to two deep red spots in her soft cheeks. It was a bad quarter of an hour for one whom all the world had been praising.

"I know," she said humbly, "I told a lie about it. I am bitterly sorry, Phil. I don't know how I came to do such a thing."



"I was thinking of you with love. I had given up my happiness because you snatched at it. You are like a child who seizes a precious thing and flings it in the dust."

A sudden horrified enlightenment broke over Colombe's face.

"Phil, Phil!" she cried, wringing her hands, "you don't mean that you cared like that? I thought it was only that you were so proud that you could not endure it to be said that a man you did not love was your lover. Is it possible, Phil, that you cared in the other way?"

"I was beginning to care," said Phil in a dull voice. "I think he was beginning to care, too. What could he have thought of me? I had promised to go, and then I went away without a word. What a poor creature he must have thought me, with another lover out of sight!"

"What I have done can be undone, Phil."

"You can not undo it. He has made no sign. You killed the beginning of his feelings for me, and neither you nor I can make it live again."

"Why did you do it?" asked Colombe, flaming into sudden fury. "Do you think I'd have let you do it if I'd known? I did know you wanted to go to Knockarea, but I fancied that it was only that they were pleasant people. If I had had the faintest inkling of such a thing, do you think I'd have stolen your lover? Upon my word, Phil, if I'm the poor creature you think me, I have you to blame for it."

"You have me to blame for it!" Phil repeated incredulously.

"It is true that you always gave in to me. Who fostered my vanity and selfishness but you? I wonder that I have a shred of good left to begin again upon."

Phil began to laugh unhappily.

"Upon my word, Colombe, you are a most unexpected person," she said. "What is Piers going to do with you?"

"Piers is going to tell me the truth. In fact, he has always told me the truth, though he loves me. I am going to tell him now that I told a horrible, mean lie."





*"It was with lowered eyelids and trembling lips that Colombe spoke."*  
P. 137.







"In order to be comforted, to be told that everything you do becomes you."

Colombe looked at her in wonder.

"Don't sneer, Phil," she said slowly. "I hardly know you when you sneer. And you wrong Piers. Piers doesn't treat me like a child."

"I know," said Phil. "You mustn't mind all I say now, Colombe."

Colombe's face twitched all over at the renewed gentleness in Phil's voice.

"Never mind," she said. "I won't ask you to forgive me now."

It was only after Colombe had gone out that Phil remembered how she had not asked her to make her confession to Piers without bringing in her name. It was an added suffering that she had given away her secret to Colombe—that she must trust her to keep it for her.

But now she let things be. She could not reopen the subject with Colombe. She took refuge in a greater silence than before; but perhaps people had grown used to Phil's having lost her old vivacity, for no one seemed to notice it but Father Tom, and it was only when Phil was not looking that he sent her those kind and faithful glances, full of a fatherly concern.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### COLOMBE'S TRIUMPH.

PHIL might have been easy in her mind if she had heard Colombe's confession to her lover. She might also have repented of her suspicion, unlike wholesome-natured Phil, that Colombe confessed to Piers for the pleasure of being absolved by him.

It was with lowered eyelids and trembling lips, and for once with no thought of how pretty she looked, that Colombe spoke. Other things she would not have minded confessing; but a lie! It was a horrid sort of transgression.



"Don't kiss me, Piers," she said. "Not till I have told you something—something I did, and, what is worse, had forgotten."

"What, sweetheart?"

"I told a lie, Piers."

"That was unlike you, Colombe."

"You think too well of me," she said, lifting eyes, innocent as a child's, to his. "And yet you know me better than any one else. I haven't told lies: perhaps it was because I had no need to. Anyhow, I told this one easily and then forgot all about it."

"What made you remember it?"

"Because of its results to some one else. I did not foresee the results, but it did harm. Do you know, Piers, I had a wild thought of begging that person never to let you know I had told that lie? I was terrified at the thought of your knowing. Then I made up my mind to tell you myself."

"That was the right thing, Colombe. You must never be afraid of me, child. I should have little enough right to judge you harshly."

"I know, Piers. But then a lie! Besides, it involved another disloyalty, for I represented you as some one else's lover."

"That was a lie, indeed, Colombe."

"And I wanted it to be believed, because I thought at the moment I cared for some one else."

"What undeceived you?"

"The news of your illness. I had grown so used to your being always there, Piers, like the air and the sun which we forget to thank God for. When I imagined a world without you—O Piers!" Colombe's face was eloquent.

Piers stooped and kissed her with an added tenderness.

"Is that all now, Colombe?"

"That is all, Piers."

"Ah, well, you will never be afraid to tell me the whole truth."

"Not so much afraid that I shall not tell you. I was terribly afraid to tell you this. But, Piers, that is not all. I told you my saying that had affected some one else. What am I to do?"



"If your confessing it will undo the mischief, Colombe, I think you will have to confess it."

"I thought of that, Piers. I don't mind the humiliation for myself. It is only that I am so soon to be yours. I felt as if I ought not to include you in the humiliation."

"And we can not be separated. My dearest, I shall not mind bearing your blame, such as it is. It is happy that you have not to bear mine."

As soon as Piers had left that night, with the farewell that grew harder to say now that there were so few more of them left to say, Colombe betook herself to her room to write her letter.

"I hate to do it," she said aloud. "I remember yesterday how I thought to get out of it by persuading myself that as soon as he heard it was I was to marry Piers he would come. But whether he comes or not, and he *must* come, I've got to swallow this pill."

A memory of her childhood, how she had been taught to breathe a pious ejaculation before swallowing a nauseous medicine, suddenly made her smile more ruefully. She shut her eyes while she smiled and said the child's prayer over. Then she began to write:

"DEAR MR. LISMORE:

"When I was at Knockarea I said one day that Mr. Piers Vanhomeigh was my sister's lover. It was not true, and I am very sorry for saying it. He was always my lover—never any one else's, and we are to be married on the twentieth. You will receive a formal invitation to my wedding in a day or two. I hope you will come, and dear Mrs. Lismore, whom I love, though I am so bad about writing to her.

"Ever your sincere friend,

"C. DE STE. CROIX."

"Let him make what he will of that," she said, signing it with a flourish. "I think he will come. I am sure of it. He could not have been so insensible to me if he had not been in love with some one else first."

She ran down-stairs with her letter and found Bridget the cook bolting up for the night.



"Wait for me a minute," she said. "I want to post a letter."

"Let me do it, miss," said Bridget.

But Colombe held her letter zealously and carried it herself to the pillar which was close at hand.

"Writin' to her sweetheart, she was," said Bridget, describing the thing to Margaret the parlor maid afterward. "I know by the way she held it agin her heart. An' she only parted wid him an hour ago. It makes me feel that romantic that I could take Brennan this minit, though I've been puttin' him off these thirty years till he was too ould for the canal-boat business. I never could bear to live on the water."

"Maybe she wasn't writin' to Mr. Piers at all," suggested Margaret. "Sure what would she have to say to him?"

"There spoke the single girl," said Bridget. "Not but what I'm single meself, but I needn't be if I liked, an' wouldn't be if Brennan wasn't that unfortunate that he always presses me whin I'm annoyed about somethin'. Lovers has always things to say to aich other, let alone that I took a stitch in my side as I was passin' the drawin'-room door this evenin', an' I heard Miss Colombe beggin' his pardon for somethin'."

"It's what I'd do to no mankind," said celibate Margaret, "but expect him to be plasin' me from mornin' till night. Let alone that Miss Colombe, though she wouldn't think of you like Miss Phil, is that pleasant when you want a hat to go out in. 'Tis beggin' her pardon he ought to be."

Happily unconscious of how much knowledge the kitchen possessed of her affairs, Colombe went upstairs with a heart lightened of its burden. With Colombe, to desire a thing and to set about possessing it was to have it.

Under the influence of the feeling she ran up and knocked at Phil's door, and was bade to enter.

Phil was brushing her hair, standing in the middle of the room. She had not forgotten the old days when she and Colombe shared a room and a glass sufficiently to brush her hair before the glass "like a Christian," as Colombe put it.



"I couldn't go to bed without making up," said Colombe.

"Let us make up," said Phil, "and not talk about it, Colombe. I never want it talked of again. After all, you could not know; and it is all over."

"It is not all over, Phil. I have been thinking. I know now that he was in love with you, or else why should he not have been in love with me?"

"It seems conclusive," said Phil.

Colombe looked at her doubtfully.

"You think I'm vain," she said in some wonder. "However, I didn't come to talk about myself. Only I wanted to assure you, Phil darling, that I am sure he cares for you. He was so disappointed when you did not come. I remember now that I felt quite vexed with him because he was so disappointed. I had always been so used to people being satisfied with me."

"Don't let us talk about it, Colombe."

"But I am talking about myself, not about you, Phil. I first began to discover that I had only been idealizing him when I found out—I could hardly believe it at first—that he didn't care for me—not in that way, I mean. He was always delighted with me, just as he used to be at Castle O'Kelly; but I know the other feeling too well—so many people have been in love with me, to say nothing of Piers—not to recognize its absence. I was very stupid not to know it was you, for I remember, before I said that, that he used to like to hear me talk of you; and you will hardly believe it, Phil, but once when I had been talking of you and went on to talk of myself, I found that he hadn't heard a word of the latter part of the conversation. I thought it very stupid, and immediately I began to compare him with Piers."

"To his disadvantage, of course?" said Phil, with a laugh.

"That was how I felt then, Phil. I was a selfish wretch then. Of course I see it all now. But things will come right, Phil, I am sure of it. And I couldn't sleep till I had asked you to kiss me and forgive me."

"I made too much of it," said generous Phil. "You never



could mean to hurt any one, Colombe. And you must forget everything I have told you. I am not the sort of girl to go wearing the willow through life, and I don't believe in the permanence of unreciprocated attachments."

Phil laughed at herself, as she had done many a time, though tears smarted in her eyes.

"I dare say there is a Piers waiting for me somewhere, or, if not a Piers exactly—that is not likely, Colombe, is it?—at least some one who will be as delightful to me as Piers is to you, and to whom I shall be about half as delightful as you are to Piers."

"You are as pretty as I am," said Colombe judicially, "only you don't know how to put on your clothes so well. And of course you are a thousand times better and cleverer than I could ever be."

"But goodness and cleverness don't count," said Phil, laughing again.

"Ah, you have an advantage over me," said Colombe, with a serious shake of her head. "You are papa's daughter. He gave you his qualities. And I—I know nothing about my father. Do you suppose he gave me his qualities, Phil?"

The mention of her father was Phil's final subjugation.

"Papa loved and believed in you, Colombe, and he taught me to do the same. And your qualities are lovely, no matter who gave them to you."

"I could not have been happy, even with Piers, if you had gone on thinking ill of me," said Colombe.

Her face, wet with Phil's tears as they kissed each other, wore the old, triumphant, all-conquering expression.

Phil had been used to say that Colombe was not happy if even the crossing-sweeper did not bless her pretty face as she went by him.



## CHAPTER XVII.

## COLOMBE IS BENEVOLENT.

FORTUNE always favored Colombe; for a couple of days later, as she was coming home and had just taken the turn into the Mall—she had stopped an instant at the bridge to speak to Katty O'Brien, the old apple-woman—some one overtook her and called her by name.

She turned, and any one who knew that she was to marry Piers Vanhomeigh in a few days might have wondered at seeing the light that broke over her face. But Piers had been sitting as patiently as he might for the last half hour in the drawing-room, which was given up of afternoons to the lovers, awaiting his tardy lady. Colombe had been paying her last visit to Brown & Thomas' for the fitting on of her wedding-dress, and for once had forbidden Piers to attend her. She would not for worlds have had him run counter to the old superstition that it is unlucky for the bride to show herself in wedding-garments before the auspicious occasion. And if Piers had been waiting outside among the ladies' papers and the model costumes, Colombe could scarce have forborne to call him in to see the ravishing spectacle she made.

She held out a frank hand to the newcomer.

"Welcome, Mr. Lismore!" she said. "It is awfully nice of you to come so quickly."

"You did not suppose I should delay," he replied, as though there were a perfect understanding between them.

"And you are going to stay for my day?"

"That depends."

Her eyes questioned him.

"There are some questions a man ought to ask for himself and a woman to answer for herself," he went on. "Still, a happy fortune has put you in my way. Tell me how much or how little your letter meant."

Colombe's eyes began to dance.



"We are within half a dozen yards of my own door-step," she said, "and some one may come out any moment and interrupt us. In fact, some one has been waiting for me for some considerable time, and I don't know how much longer four walls will hold him. Suppose we go over there and talk it out."

She indicated the further side of the canal, where a seat stood amid the golden wreckage of the leaves.

They went quickly over the bridge, somewhat to the scandal of Katty O'Brien, who had looked on at Colombe's love-affairs many years and had thought it time they terminated in happy marriage.

The seat was near the arch of the bridge, close to the water's edge, and quite secluded, though Colombe could keep a sympathetic observation on the house where Piers by this time was chafing.

"You've forgiven me for that story?" she asked when they were seated.

"I wonder why you told it," he said.

"Ah, that you are never to know," said Colombe, turning a little red.

"You did all that was possible in telling me," he went on. "I think it was very brave of you. I don't mind confessing now that it was a horrible facer when you said it. Probably I imagined much more than you intended. But tell me, now, Miss Colombe—you are always my friend, aren't you?—how much or how little did you mean by that friendly summons?"

"There is my poor Piers," said Colombe irrelevantly. "He's beginning to think now that I have wandered under one of those horrible electric tramcars. As though I should ever do such a thing!"

"I will let you go to him in an instant; only I want you to answer my question."

"There isn't any hurry. About how much I meant, wasn't it? I think you had better ask some one else."

"Ah,"—a gleam of delight broke over his brown face—"you meant that? You are too good to me, Miss Colombe. I don't deserve it. I was an unready fellow and faint-hearted, or I should





“ ‘Welcome, Mr. Lismore!’ she said. ‘It is awfully nice of you to come so quickly.’ ” P. 145.







have set myself against the other man whom I believed to be her lover."

"Against Piers!" said Colombe in amazement. "You wouldn't have had a chance."

Lismore smiled under his mustache.

"I think I should all the same," he said.

"Then you are frightfully conceited. Ah, there goes Piers again. I fancy he's frowning, though I can't be sure at this distance. If he takes to biting his nails I shall have to go. It shows the last extremity of distress with Piers."

"I shall let you go in an instant—that is, if you will take me home with you. Why wouldn't your sister come to Knockarea after she had promised me to come?"

"That is just the one thing you must never ask," said Colombe, "for Phil will never tell you, and neither shall I."

"It was inexplicable, for she had seemed to care to listen when I told her about my home. I should not have dared to prose to you as I did to her."

"I know," said Colombe, with a slight resentment, "you never talked to me about anything serious."

"There is only one woman to whom a man will talk about his home and childhood and such things, and never fear that she will think him dull."

"She does, though, sometimes. I've been talked to about ever so many people's homes and childhoods. I never found any of them interesting but Piers'. He seems to have had a different kind of home and childhood."

"I never bored you that way," he said, laughing.

"No, indeed, you didn't." A flash of audacity came into Colombe's blue eyes. "I wonder who could have refrained."

"It was dull of me," he confessed. "I couldn't have helped it, only, see—I had met the one woman."

"We had better be seeking her," said Colombe. "I am getting uneasy about Piers. He hasn't come back, and the last time he went by he was just going to bite his nails."



"Ah, well, he can afford to wait a bit. He's a lucky fellow, Miss Colombe!"

"We'd better hurry back, or Katty O'Brien won't be able to keep her counsel. She knows I am here all the time, and she has assumed a watch over my conduct ever since I was three years old."

"Katty O'Brien?"

"The apple-woman at the bridge. Only for her, she says, I'd have been drowned twenty times over before I was five years old. We were quite young women before she would let us leave the house unaccompanied. I assure you we have had to go out the back way to avoid being driven back by her. Even now she can't bear us to walk the canal side of the road. I expect she has really been too busy watching me now to betray me to Piers."

The rosy-cheeked old apple-woman seemed to be gazing into distance as they passed her by, but her brow cleared as she beheld presently the meeting with Mr. Vanhomeigh and the cordial greeting between the two men.

"I had to talk to Mr. Lismore about something, Piers," Colombe explained, "and so we've been sitting on that seat over there for the last half hour watching you walking up and down."

"Don't you pity me, Lismore?" said Piers, laughing boyishly. "I fret and fume all the afternoon while this young lady tries on new frocks, and at the end of it she can watch my sufferings in this cold-blooded way!"

"I think you are the least-to-be-pitied man in the world," said Lismore, with a conviction that made Colombe give him a very sweet smile.

They were walking back to the house together by this time.

"Is there any one in, Piers?" asked Colombe.

"Only Phil."

"Ah, Phil will do very well to talk to Mr. Lismore while you finish your smoke. How many cigarettes did you light and fling away while you waited, Piers? Every few seconds I saw the spurt of a match in the blue twilight across the canal."



"I couldn't have believed it of you, Colombe—could you, Lismore?"

"I've seen it," said Lismore, laughing light-heartedly.

He and Colombe went in together while Piers waited outside. In a few seconds he was joined by the young lady, who slipped her arm through his affectionately.

"What is it about Lismore, Colombe?" he asked.

"I think he's on the way to be as happy a man as you are, Piers."

"Ah, is that it?"

A light was breaking over Piers' mind about many things that had somewhat puzzled him.

"I thought Phil was not the same lately," he said.

"You noticed it? Do you know what she contemplated, Piers? I've only just found out. She was going to Castle O'Kelly to help to look after the old ladies. There would not be a soul within miles of her of her own class who was not old. Aunt Peggy would have been the youngest. Think of her among those old, old souls!"

"Horrible!" said Piers.

"It wouldn't have been horrible. Phil would have made a queer kind of happiness for herself. Not unnatural, but only supernatural. She offered herself to that beautiful creature, Mrs. Lloyd, to do anything she would or go anywhere. Mrs. Lloyd tried to dissuade her, but finally assented to her going to Castle O'Kelly. She thought it would be a hard probation with all those old ladies, and that Phil would find it too hard. I think she under-rated Phil's constancy. Afterward, if Phil persevered, she promised to keep her near herself. Phil worships Mrs. Lloyd. I can understand the feeling, Piers, though you would hardly believe it."

"Your mission is to look after me, child, and Phil's is, I suppose, to look after Lismore."

"And Katty O'Brien's to look after me. See, Piers, she is smiling broadly at us. I think she had a dreadful suspicion that I was deceiving you when she saw me with Mr. Lismore. Katty was always ready to believe the worst of me."



"You are like the naughty child that is always the best-beloved."

"I wonder how Phil is getting on. I told her we should want tea in three-quarters of an hour. Was that long enough, Piers?"

"It depends on what it was for, my sweetheart."

"Oh, for explanations and things. Anyhow, it is half an hour later than usual, and I am very hungry."

"It is as long as you could be expected to wait, then."

"I am so fond of Phil I would do anything for her. How lucky Uncle Ralph and Aunt Peggy were out and mamma at the hospital!"

"Yes, Lismore was rather in luck."

"Especially in meeting me. I made things easy for him."

"You weren't long about it."

"I just asked Phil in the most casual way to go in and talk to some one in the drawing-room, as you were waiting for me outside. She came like a lamb, poor dear, without even asking who it was. I never could have believed that I should take such interest in any one else's love-affairs."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### PHIL'S REWARD.

PHIL came down in the dark, hardly wondering who it was she might be called upon to entertain. Colombe had a way of handing over her responsibilities when they irked her at all, so that her sudden summons had not been a matter of surprise to her sister.

Some one stood tall and dark against the light from the dim window. Margaret had not yet come in to light the lamps, and it was blind man's holiday in the room, where spurts of flame from the little clear fire only made darkness visible.

The some one turned as Phil came in, and held out his hand. Then she saw who it was, and her heart gave a great leap of gladness.



"You have come to the wedding?" she asked, with a gayety that surprised herself.

"Preceding my mother by a day or two," he said. "We could not deny ourselves the pleasure of seeing so charming a bride as your sister will make. We are at the Shelbonne—at least I am, and my mother will be there on Thursday."

He was still holding her hand, and Phil made no effort to withdraw it, though she had an uneasy sense that Margaret might come in at any moment to light the lamps.

She shook her head with a demureness which Lismore had always thought bewitching in her; it had a certain delightful incongruity with her frankness of look and manner.

"I wonder if Colombe would think that any man ought to find it a pleasure to see her a bride."

"She seems very happy with the man of her choice," he said.

"There is nobody to compare with Piers, of course," she replied. "Still, I hardly think that Colombe will give up her subjugating habit."

"She is irresistible. No man could stand out against her unless—there were some one else."

There was a second's pause, and Phil made a little effort to withdraw her hand from his. But he only held it the more firmly and drew her a little nearer by it.

"I was subjected to Miss Colombe's fascinations all the summer," he said. "I should have been a most unwilling witness of her marriage ceremony—indeed, I should now be sitting with my head in my hands at Knockarea only for one thing."

"And that?" in a low voice.

"There is some one else. There has been some one else since I opened my eyes after I got my head broken in the wreck. Ah"—with a remorseful air—"I was going to call it a lucky wreck, forgetting those poor lads of mine who were lost."

"Colombe told me how you had taken care of those they left."

"Of course; that had to be done. But tell me, now. We touched almost perfect friendship during that time when you



nursed me back to life and health. Why has our friendship suffered a lapse during all one summer?"

"I thought you had forgotten."

"And I thought you had broken faith. Later on I thought I knew why. Your sister says that I must never ask why you broke your promise to come to Knockarea."

"You must never ask that."

"Not even—presently? If you knew how horribly you disappointed me. I had had a vision of you where my fathers have been before me. Even—Colombe could not make up for the loss of that."

"Why didn't you write and tell me?" She lifted fervent eyes to his. "If I had been sure you cared for me, nothing, nothing would have induced me to disappoint you."

" 'If he loves me, this believe,  
I will die ere he shall grieve,' "

he paraphrased happily.

"I had no mind to hurry my joy, Phil," he said. "Our friendship was exquisite enough. I thought I had a whole summer for my courtship. Now we are on the edge of winter, and I can wait no longer. Winter lights the hearth-fire, Phil."

"I thought it would never be lighted for me," she said, with a half-sad air, as one who listens to a sad strain in the midst of happiness.

"It is lighted now," he said, "and the hearth swept and garnished. If you would not take possession of the house no other woman ever should."

"You would have been so faithful?" she said in wonder.

"No woman attracted me—in that way—before you came, though I am far from being a woman-hater. If we had been separated, the place would have remained empty waiting your presence."

"I too," she said—"I have always wondered at the fancies of other girls. I suppose I must have been waiting."



"Ours must be a love-story without a hero," he said half ruefully. "How could I ever have distrusted those frank eyes? I should have believed them though all the world said no."

"Ah, well," she said, with a deep sigh of content, "we have yet a great many years, God willing, in which to make up."

"God willing," he repeated, looking gravely down with all the joy of his youth in his eyes on the dark and comely face against his breast.

"Perhaps this would not have been so wonderful," she said, half to herself, "if there had not been the loss and the loneliness that went before."

### EPILOGUE.

THE new inmates of Castle O'Kelly had been two months in possession when Phil Lismore, home from her leisurely honeymoon and on her way to her husband's shooting-lodge, paid her Aunt Fin a much-desired visit of a few days.

She and her husband, who showed no symptom of ceasing to be the bridegroom, walked over from the cross-roads, leaving Tim Healy, driven by the new young man-of-all-work, to carry the luggage. It was still a joy to them to walk, hand in hand, a happy pair of lovers, along the roads scented with airs of April, where every roadside bush held its pair of feathered sweethearts.

"Herself," said Bodkin, coming out to welcome "Miss Phil," as he will always call her, "is above, givin' the finishin' touches to your room. She won't expect yez till she hears Tim's trot, an' that'll be maybe in an hour or two, for he'll no more be druv be the new bye thin he would be by herself. He's more impident nor ever be rayson of the pettin' he does be gittin' from th' ould ladies. You'd think apples an' sugar was the natcheral food for a baste, to see how they stuffs him. The new bye thought he'd git the bettther of Tim, but 'tis broken-hearted, aye, an' broken-winded he'll be before he does it. I'd back Tim agin anny bye. Aye, faith, he'd be a bigger divil nor anny of them."

"You're quite well yourself, Bodkin, I hope."



"Grand, ma'am, an' plinty to do. There's a great stir in the place entirely, an' a new cook an' a couple o' maids under her. I find th' ould ladies rale pleasant to sarve. Bein' the rale ould quality they are, they're aisy plaised, an' that thankful for every hand's turn you do for thim! 'Twas a great riddance o' bad rubbish to git shut of that Bessie woman. When she wasn't too friendly 'twas quarrelin' she was."

"Ah, she's housekeeping for Mrs. Ralph Featherstonehaugh, I hear."

"For Miss Peggy. She is; an' betther there nor here, says I."

The old place was looking its best. The persiennes had been newly painted, the windows fresh glazed in the gaps where brown paper had done duty for many a year. The grassy space in front, which used to be disgracefully overgrown, now presented a silken-smooth aspect. In the little field below a couple of black Kerries were placidly chewing the cud. The old tangle of pears and plums in blossom looked over the garden wall. Phil was glad things had not been tidied out of all recognition.

A moment later and she was gathered to Miss O'Kelly's heart.

"Welcome to the house which you and your sister have made a kindly home for the homeless," she said.

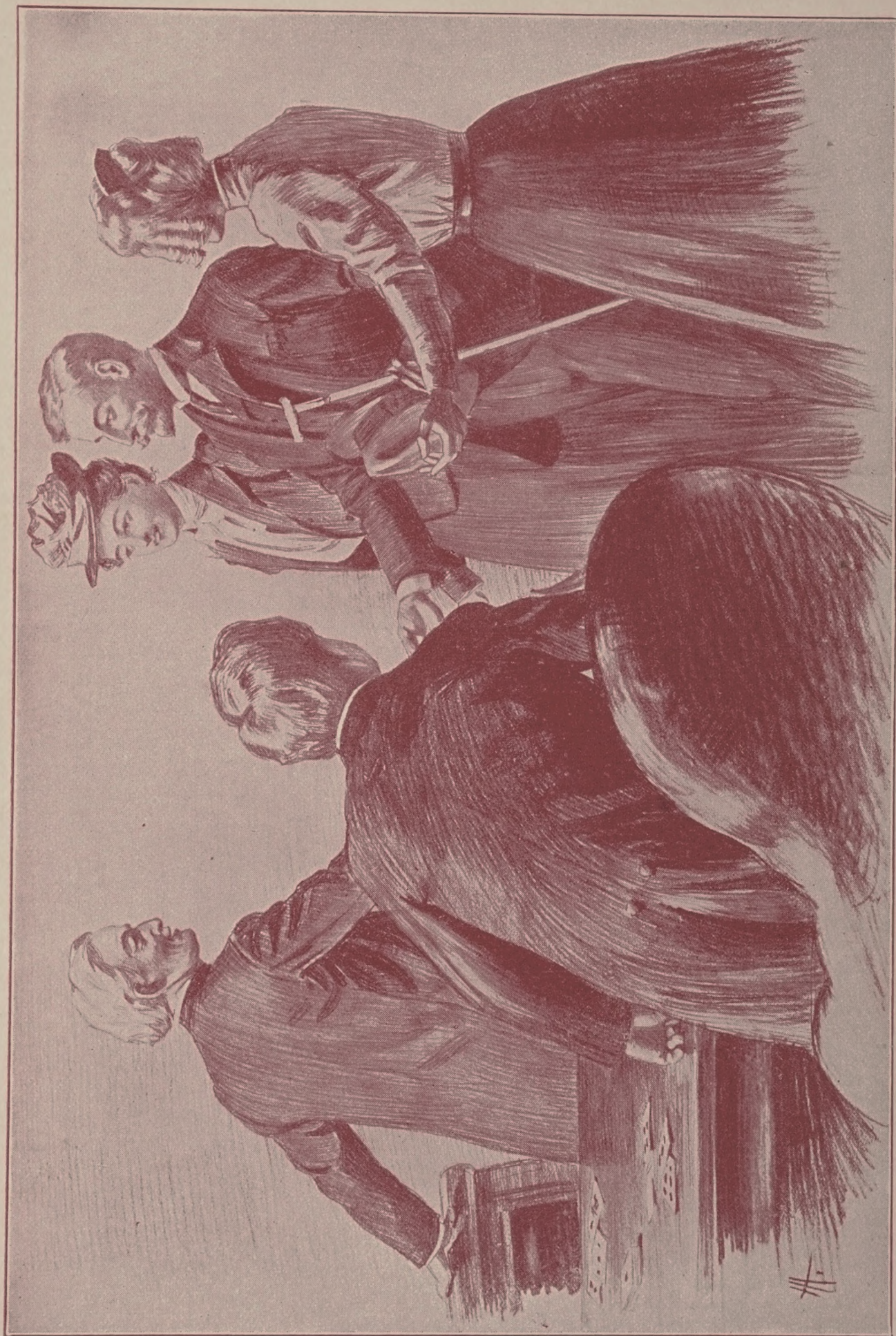
"He is the one to be thanked," said Phil, indicating her husband.

"God bless him!" said Miss O'Kelly, but said no more, rightly conjecturing that her new nephew-in-law would dread praise and thanks more than anything.

"The house is just the same," Miss O'Kelly went on. "We have changed it as little as possible. We all felt that too much completeness would savor of an institution, and that we dread above all things. Then we have all our little treasures; and the spaciousness of Castle O'Kelly permits us to have a room apiece. We encroached as little as possible on each other in Dublin. Still, it was a trial that we could not have our solitude."

The April wind, fresh from roaming over sea and mountain, blew sweetly through the open windows, lifting the curtains of





*“She ushered them both into the presence of Father Kirwan and the parson, Mr. Thornhill.” P. 159.*







apple-blossom chintz, tenderly faded, which Phil remembered to have seen in Dublin.

"We are all out of doors," said Miss O'Kelly, "walking or gardening, or doing what we will, except a few of us who are in the work-room, doing something which is a close secret."

She opened the door of the long drawing-room and ushered them both into the presence of Father Kirwan and the parson, Mr. Thornhill.

"See," she said to Lismore, "I have scoured the country for male society for you. They will tell you all about the trout-fishing. To think it is only now you have come to Acton, after all!"

Then she took Phil upstairs, opening a door here and there as they went. Perfect purity and a certain ascetic comfortableness marked each of the rooms.

"You mustn't pretend you know, my dear," she said to Phil; "but they are embroidering a beautiful gift of house-linen for you, just as beautiful as what they gave to Colombe. Our foundress comes down next week for the presentation. You will say when you see it that not money, but only love, could inspire such work.

"Oh, we are happy, my dear. Each one of us is what she would be in her own home if God had not willed us to be homeless for a time. We are gardeners, we are cooks, we are housewives, we are dairy-women, we have our bees and our fowls, except the very old of us, who sit in the sun and wait for the long rest. The more servile work of the house is done for us, but the work that ladies love to do in their own kingdom we do for ourselves."

"You are ten years younger, Aunt Fin."

"I am the child of the house, and I need to be the youngest, since I direct the worldly affairs of it. The worst of it is that we are so happy that none of us will want to die. But you have not seen the best of all."

She opened slowly and softly the door of the great room



with its tarnished glories which once, long ago in the great days, had been the ball-room of Castle O'Kelly.

It was dim and quiet now. There was no sound in it save the crooning of a dove on the window-sill. At the far end a little rosy light throbbed like a heart before the altar.

They knelt down for a second or two, then withdrew, and left the chapel to the one or two quiet old souls who were praying there.

"Father Tom says Mass every morning," said Miss O'Kelly, when the door had closed behind them. "And when the winter comes and the storms beat so against his little church the people are to come here. The people are delighted with the new state of affairs at Castle O'Kelly. Why, there is hardly a great old name in Ireland which is not represented here. The residence of so much quality has made the Glen feel quite aristocratic. In Dublin, no matter how kindly our foundress strove, we must always feel that our home was a charity. Now we are in our right place, among the people, of all others, to whom money means nothing and blood and brains and virtue and beauty much. The Glen has never bent the knee to Mammon. To the Glen 'th' ould blood' yet counts as a thing all honorable."



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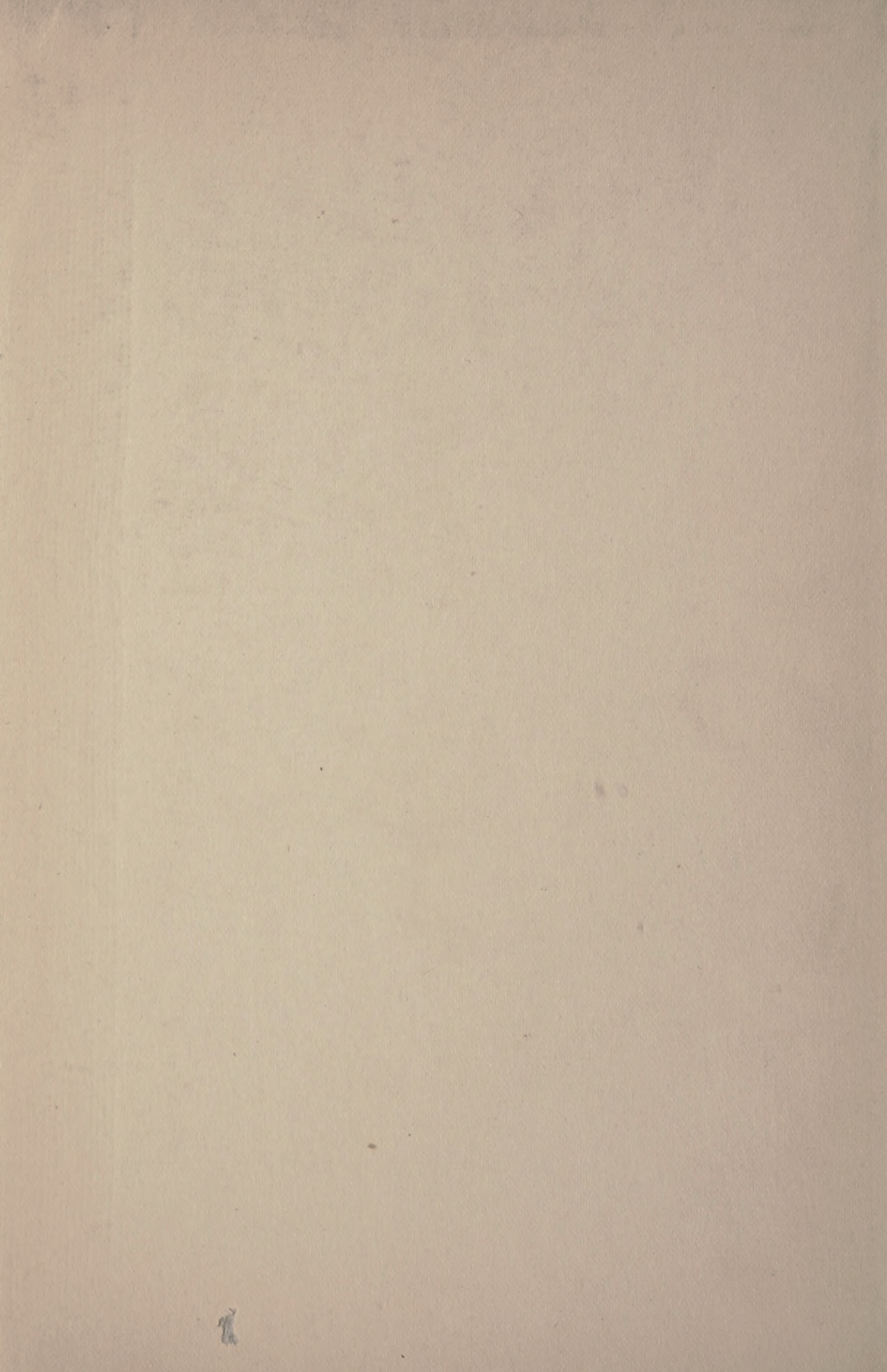














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